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"THE LADDER FELL, AND BURNING BEAMS CAME DOWN WITH IT."

FLYING HILL FARM

A Story

BY

SOPHIE SWETT

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN POLLY" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

1892

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FLYING HILL FARM.

CHAPTER I.

The great barn at Flying Hill Farm was a pleasant place, with its wide doors open at either end, and a June breeze, sweet with pinks and syringas, blowing through. The lofts were piled high with new-mown hay, swallows were wheeling in the dusky spaces overhead, and doves cooing in the sunshine; the old gobbler, whose temper was growing more and more infirm with age, was scraping the floor with his wings, and gobbling with frantic rage at the pert little bantam rooster—only a crumb of a rooster, but with a lion heart—that would crow defiantly under his very nose; the yellow downy ducklings were waddling up from the brook in a straggling, quacking procession, and great shaggy Sultan was drowsing in the door-way, too sleepy to snub the yellow kitten for making free with his tail. A very pleasant place it was, but the tall slender boy, with a delicate handsome face, who was perched upon one of the rounds of the ladder that led to the hay-loft, looked peevish and unhappy; and his cousin Cherry — her name, as recorded in the great family Bible, was Charity, after Grandma Brewster— a fourteen-year-old girl, looked as dejected as it is pos-

sible for a round rosy face to look, with a dimple in its chin, a twinkle in its eyes, and a nose the least bit snub.

"This new teacher isn't a bit like old Proudfit—no, I sha'n't say *Miss* Proudfit, if I don't like; you're as bad as Rhoda. She skipped 'round, and asked a lot of bothering questions. You be sure to write the explanation as plain as can be of that fox and greyhound example. It's mean to get up those old-fashioned things, anyway; Proudfit never did. I shall get found out if you don't look orfle sharp. You're not half so particular as you used to be; you seem to think I'm going to do most of the examples myself. I want them all done, you know; only a little bit wrong here and there. You ought to know without my telling you. A fellow doesn't like to talk about it. This new teacher thinks an orfle lot of 'rithmetic. What do you think she did this forenoon?—began to have us big fellows say the multiplication table all 'round!"

"Oh, Phonse!" cried Cherry, in dismay.

"Luckily they all said it off so glibly that she gave it up before she got to me."

"Phonse, what we've done is awfully wicked, and mean and sneaking, too," said Cherry, firmly. "I don't see how we came to do it. But you were such a little fellow when you first went to school, so small and forlorn in your skirts, though you didn't seem to mind those as Ben did. And that was a cross teacher, wasn't she?—Miss Plumfill, with so many different ear-rings, and I couldn't help whispering your answers to you."

"Didn't I draw her, though!" cried Phonse, triumphantly. "She learned better than to make the sevens and the nines and all those mean numbers come to me!"

"It was wonderful to see the things that you could draw even then," said Cherry, her face brightening in a momentary forgetfulness of her trouble. "And if I



"PHONSE AND CHERRY IN THE BARN."

tried to draw even the cat that the old woman found in her pan of milk, every one took it for a sheep. The tail had to be rather thick, you know."

"A sheep! Why, you can't draw anything that could be taken for any kind of an animal, even now," said Phonse, with a candor which made Cherry wince a little, although she laughed.

"Phonse, won't you try to do the examples all by yourself?" she said, returning to the charge. "Or else won't you tell the teacher that you can't, and I'll try to make Uncle David understand how hard it is for you—"

"You want to shame me before everybody, do you? If that isn't meaner than I thought even a girl could be!" cried Phonse. "And you've always pretended that you wanted to do everything you could for me. I heard you say once that you promised grandma—"

"Oh, I did, Phonse! I didn't know that you knew it, but I did. It was the very night before she died. I was on the sofa in her room with Fluff the Angora kitten—"

"What a beauty that kitten was, and how fond of me! She would scarcely go to anybody else," interrupted Phonse.

"And how you took care of her when her leg was broken!—you sat up all night long with her," said Cherry. "Grandma was talking to herself that night when I was sitting on the sofa with Fluff," she continued, returning to the subject with an evident effort. "She was talking about you. I think she was fonder of you than of any one. She said"—Cherry spoke very slowly, as if feeling her way—"that you were not—were not just like every one else; that you were like your father. I think grandma was always proud that he would have been a great artist if he had lived, al-

though grandpa didn't like it. She said that you were sensitive, and no one would understand and look out for you. And I dropped Fluff and ran to the bed, and I said, 'Grandma, I do! I will!' 'You, child!' she said, and she almost smiled. And then she partly raised herself in the bed, and she looked at me with her eyes so dark and solemn that I was almost afraid, and she said, 'Don't forget, Cherry! Never forget!'"

Phonse had broken off the point of his pencil and was whittling another, his whole soul apparently absorbed in his occupation.

"I only told you," said Cherry, after a moment, "to show you that I must want awfully to help you—"

"Oh, bother all that rubbish; that sounds like a silly story-book!" cried Phonse. "It's a great lot of helping to make a few figures for a fellow, isn't it? See here, Cherry!" Phonse's tone softened, and he drew from his pocket a well-worn sketch-book and opened it before Cherry's eyes. "You can't expect a fellow who can do that to bother himself about 'rithmetic, can you?"

"Oh, Phonse, it's Dapple and her colt, and they're perfect! One almost expects to see the colt toss his head and scamper off. Show it to Rhoda, Phonse. Here she comes."

"*Rhoda!*" exclaimed Phonse, scornfully. "She would say, 'It's real cunning'—I make a slip once in a while myself, but I don't say *real*—'it's real cunning, but are you sure that the legs are quite straight?' And then she would say—she has said it a thousand times—'Oh, Phonsy, won't you make a motto? I think you could make the letters straight if you tried.'"

Phonse spoke in a mimicking, falsetto voice, and his handsome face wore a sneering expression that was very unpleasant to see. "Bah! I'm off, if she's com-

ing! She rubs me the wrong way. I can feel the sparks fly the minute she comes near."

Rhoda came in through the wood-shed as Phonse went out through one of the wide doors. She had a bit of crochet-work in her hand, and she sat down in the swing, allowing it to sway as it would.

She was smaller than Cherry, although half a year older, and her features were of a doll-like smallness and primness. Her brown hair was very tightly braided and shiningly smooth. Phonse declared that Rhoda's head looked as if it were sand-papered.

"Isn't Phonse here? I thought I heard his voice," she said. "Miss Peckett, the new teacher in his room, asked me if he hadn't a very original mind. I said he *was* queer. It seemed to be about arithmetic that she was thinking. She said he seemed to do better than most of the boys, but he had to do it in his own way. She couldn't be sure that he understood what he was doing at all. I said"—Rhoda suddenly held the swing motionless with her feet, and, pressing the point of her crochet-kneedle against her cheek, looked steadfastly at Cherry—"I said I thought he might do better if she should change his seat from that old monitor's desk in the corner to one down among the other boys."

There was no doubt about what Rhoda meant. Cherry's cheeks were burning, and there was a mist between her and the pleasant green world outside the wide barn door. It was bitter not to be able to hold one's head up before Rhoda, or meet her gaze straightforwardly. And then suddenly her temper leaped up. It was like a jack-in-the-box, that temper of Cherry's, and Rhoda's fingers had such a knack at the lock. She was all ready to pour out a torrent of reproaches upon Rhoda, when she surprised her out of her anger by saying,

"Cherry, did you ever think that there was anything the matter with Phonse's eyes?"

"With his eyes?" repeated Cherry.

"I thought he must be very near-sighted, because, the other day, when we were coming by the Bayberry church, at the corner, he couldn't tell what time it was. And yesterday I called to him from the piazza to tell me just what time it was by the hall clock--papa was going to the train, and his watch had stopped—and he told me to come and see myself; he wasn't going to *squiggle* his eyes all up for anybody. I thought at first that perhaps he was only cross—Phonse so often is cross—but I remembered other things, and putting two and two together—"

"I don't see why you should always be putting two and two together. It is most disagreeable!" cried Cherry.

Jack was quite out of the box now; there was no pressing the lid down over him. Phonse's secret—his pitiful little secret, which she had let him think was all his own, although it was more than a year ago that she had discovered it—Rhoda had found that out too; and although it was such a little thing, and might come right in time, Rhoda would make much of it.

"I think it ought to be known," said Rhoda, severely; "it is a deceit. He tells wrong stories about it continually, and it is so perfectly ridiculous for a great boy like that! What would any one do who shirked everything that didn't come easy? How is he ever going to get along in the world, a boy who can't—"

"He is going to get along because he has more brains than most people in other ways, and because I am going to help him," cried Cherry, fiercely. "And if any one tries to interfere with us—" And then she

broke down completely, and rushed up the ladder to the hay-mow, which was always a grateful refuge when temper or tears overcame her.

Poor tempestuous Cherry! And Rhoda's voice followed her clear and firm:

"Papa asked me what would be best to give Phonse for a birthday present, and I said a watch. He certainly ought to learn—"

Rhoda never showed temper; she only grew colder and more dignified when she was angry, while Cherry, once at the mercy of the impish jack, was in a tumult of rage. She threw herself down on the hay, and put her fingers in her ears, for Rhoda would be likely to go on talking, apparently not realizing in the least that she was saying anything unpleasant.

The scent of the new-mown hay was delicious; there was a window near her which was a framework for a bit of blue sky, so softly, deeply blue that it was like a balm to angry, tearful eyes; in and out of the window, snowy white against the blue, flew Phonse's pretty fan-tailed pigeons. Cherry wished that she might take her fingers out of her ears and hear nothing but their soft and soothing coos; but Rhoda was probably still going on, saying "horrid things" in that calm and even voice of hers.

As her anger cooled Cherry began to feel wicked and miserable and deeply penitent. Rhoda's misdeeds loomed less darkly before her than her own. Rhoda was at least quite incapable of cheating. What a trifling thing it had seemed at first to try to help Phonse—such a poor little fellow! with lessons about which he was strangely dull—and how queer it was that it could have gone on so long! The teacher had been careless, and that solitary corner seat had favored the deceit so much. The boys thought Phonse could do the fox and

greyhound problem, the one about the frog coming out of the well, even the one about the shadow cast by the dial, when, in fact, he was scarcely equal to the literal performance of Rhoda's favorite mental feat of putting two and two together!

But she need no longer puzzle her brains for a way to put an end to the cheating. Rhoda would attend to that, she thought bitterly.

Suddenly a fine clear whistle penetrated even her closed ears; they must be altogether deaf ears which Ben's whistle could fail to reach.

Cherry felt a little thrill of hope and cheer.

Ben brought that kind of thing with him, one hardly knew how. He was as bracing as a north wind. He never seemed to believe that there was anything that could not be done. He always said "there never was a scrape without a way out of it."

Ben sometimes got into scrapes himself, it must be acknowledged, being a boy, but his way of getting out of them was always a fair and manly one.

Cherry's second thought made her heart sink again. Ben would be quite incapable of getting into such a "scrape" as she and Phonse had done. Ben was what Simmy Backup, their friend and neighbor, called "an orfle square feller." It would be difficult to tell Ben about it, having Ben's honest blue eyes looking straight at one; but as Ben's whistle rang out again, supplemented by a shout of "Cherry! Cherry!" she found heart to answer,

"I'm here, Ben—up in the loft!"

Rhoda, it appeared, had gone. That, Cherry said to herself, was some consolation.

A round head, thatched with dark tight curls, appeared above the topmost rung of the ladder. Those curls were the trial of Ben's life, it being from his point

of view strictly necessary to thrash a boy, whatever his size, who called one "Sissy".

"Howling! Well, it must take a good deal to make a fellow howl to-day, if a fellow is a girl. There are the strawberries getting ripe down in the south meadow, thick as spatter; Gordon's brook is full of trout; there's the picnic on Tumble Down Hill coming off to-morrow. I can't say *I* think much of picnics myself, but girls like them. And papa says the new colt is to be yours; and see here!" Ben drew out of his pockets, which Cherry had previously observed to be much distended, a pair of very small lop-eared rabbits.

"Beauties, aren't they?" he said, in response to Cherry's exclamation of delight. "I got them for Phonse. Bought them of Tommy Nute—a quarter and my second-best jack-knife, and some fish-hooks and a harmonica, and an old story-book. Tommy is sharp, you know. I've been about a week bringing him to those terms; had to throw in three of Loveday's dough-nuts, as it was; but I was determined to have them. Phonse has been wanting rabbits for so long, and I knew he was orfle short. Besides, he couldn't drive any kind of a bargain with Tommy Nute."

Cherry's face was all aglow. Truly Ben was no Job's comforter.

"Oh, they are so pretty, and Phonse will be so pleased!" she exclaimed. "And you are the best cousin, the dearest, most generous boy—"

"Oh, I'm a fine fellow, of course," said Ben; "but you see, Cherry, this isn't exactly a matter of generosity. Phonse is an orfle obstinate fellow, you know, and he will do something that I don't want him to, and these rabbits are to—well, not to hire him off; you couldn't do that to Phonse if you wanted to—but they are to take his mind off Simmy Backup's pig. When

you're trying to develop a pig's mentality it's fatal to overfeed him, and Phonse is always afraid something is hungry; of course a pig will eat all the time if you let him. Yesterday I caught Phonse stuffing Loveday's company pound-cake down that pig's throat; he said he ate it as if he were starving, poor pig! A pig, you know—of course he would. And he always calls him 'poor pig!' And he is all the time stuffing him. Of course Simmy can't educate him. And I've shown him how, and I'm helping him, and of course I feel responsible." The tone was gloomy, very, for Ben.

"I thought he shouldered arms beautifully, Ben," said Cherry, consolingly.

"He did, didn't he?" Ben's face brightened. "But that was before Phonse began to feed him so. He's so fat now he really can't, you know. It's not of much use to try to coax Phonse, and of no use at all to get mad with him. But Simmy thinks I ought to stop him."

"He is so tender-hearted," murmured Cherry, apologetically.

"Garibaldi likes being trained. It's an immense thing for him. If it hurt him in the least Simmy wouldn't do it; nor I wouldn't, not a bit sooner than Phonse. Isn't it better, as Simmy says, for him to be a performing pig, with his name in big letters on a show-bill, than to be made into pork?"

Cherry nodded rather vaguely and absently; perhaps she didn't feel qualified to decide the question; it is no doubt difficult, notwithstanding Simmy Backup's confidence, to enter into the tastes and preferences of a pig.

"I've been getting provoked with Rhoda," Cherry said, dejectedly.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Ben, with a sympathetic

accent. "Well, Rhoda is a—a kind of a hoarhound-drop sometimes; but then perhaps she's wholesome."

"I wouldn't mind if she only wouldn't pick upon Phonse," said Cherry.

"Oh, let Phonse fight his own battles; what's a fellow for but to do that, and to fight other people's when they can't. It's good for him."

Even Ben would never understand that Phonse couldn't be like other people.

He had restored the rabbits to his pockets, taking great pains to give them plenty of air, and was about to descend the ladder, when he stopped suddenly.

"Oh, Cherry, such a queer thing has happened. I wonder that I forgot to tell you. Those rabbits drove everything else out of my head. Phonse has got to go to court."

"To court!" Cherry sprang up from the hay, her face growing white. A host of vague fears rushed upon her. Could it be about the examples? As bad as that was, it could scarcely be a crime against the law; and Phonse surely could not be arrested for feeding Simmy Backup's pig, although it was sorely against Simmy's will. If it really interfered with the pig's education perhaps he might be "bound over to keep the peace," or something of that kind; but surely Deacon Backup would have appealed to Phonse's uncle before taking any severe measures. What could Phonse have been doing? She could not find voice to ask, although Ben, standing on the topmost rung of the ladder, was arranging his pockets for the greater convenience of their occupants, and giving his whole mind to that occupation, oblivious of the suspense that she was suffering.

CHAPTER II.

Ben at length had his rabbits satisfactorily arranged, one pinky-white ear hanging out of each of his jacket-pockets, and his mind was at liberty to return to matters of less personal moment.

"You know the old tin-peddler Preserved Gage—Plum Preserves, the fellows call him? Well—what in the world are you looking so scared about, Cherry? Is it because Phonse has got to go to court? Pooh! that's nothing; it's rather good fun. And it's such a queer thing—so much depends on Phonse's remembering. You know Preserved got run into by the train down at the crossing last spring. He had left his wagon standing at the door of Hickey's store, and was going across the track to carry a broom to old Mrs. Prendergast. Joe Grier, the flagman, called to him to wait, but he was too eager for a trade, and so the engine struck him. It knocked him off the track, and he didn't seem to be much hurt. They said he picked himself up and got onto his wagon without help, and began to make a fuss about the loss of his broom, which was all knocked into splinters. But now he has sued the railroad company for an orfle lot of damages; says his spine was injured, and that affected his eyesight so that now he's stone-blind, and he's got a doctor to swear to it. Perhaps it is so; nobody knows; but it will come pretty hard to the Byerly branch to pay all that money. It's a separate thing from the main road, you know, and it's responsible. It's all

owned by two or three men, and father is one of them. So you see if Preserved is shamming, it's pretty important to prove it. He says that he couldn't see much of anything when he got onto his wagon after the accident, but he was too scared and bewildered to say anything about it, and that his eyesight kept growing dimmer and dimmer until, when he got home, his daughter had to lead him into the house. And he's got a doctor to testify that in a certain kind of an injury to the spine or brain, I don't exactly know which, the optic nerve might be affected just like that. But then appears Eli Perigo, and testifies that he met Preserved on his way home that afternoon, and Preserved complained that the train was ahead of time; he knew it, because when he came by the Bayberry church, fifteen minutes after the accident, it was just nineteen minutes past three by the clock in the steeple, and the train wasn't due until quarter-past three. He asked Eli if he didn't think he would be more likely to get damages from the railroad company on that account. Then, of course, the company's lawyer inquired of Plum Preserves how he could see the time by the Bayberry church clock, which is across a field from the road, if he was so nearly blind, as he said. That might have been a poser for Preserved, you see. And they said he looked a little queer for a minute. Then he said that, as he came along by that field near the church, he saw something that looked like a man or a boy sitting on the stone wall; that he asked him what time it was by the Bayberry church clock, and the boy answered (he found out afterwards 'twas a boy) just nineteen minutes past three. Then the figure got down from the fence and came up to the wagon to hear him tell about the accident, and he saw it was 'one of the Flying Hill Farm boys—the handsome feller'; then, for

fear people would think he must certainly mean me, he went on to say 'the one they called Phonse.'

"So now Phonse has got to go to court and testify whether he did or did not tell Preserved Gage what time it was by the Bayberry church clock on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of March. And I can tell you father is pretty anxious to know whether he did or didn't; he has asked me twice whether it wasn't time for him to come home from school, and it isn't three o'clock yet. Now doesn't it seem queer for so much to be depending upon Phonse?"

"Ben, you must tell your father that Phonse can't go to court!" Cherry's voice shook with her eagerness. "He will listen to you. Phonse really can't go. He couldn't bear it, he is so sensitive."

"Cherry, I must say that for a sensible girl otherwise you are the greatest goose about Phonse! Sensitive! I should like to know what hurt it is going to do a fellow, if he *is* sensitive, to stand up and say whether he told a man the time of day or not. If he doesn't remember, he has only to say that he doesn't."

Cherry's face brightened, but only for a moment.

"He is sure to remember," she said, dejectedly. "The lawyers will question and question him and try to confuse him, won't they?"

"How could a fellow get confused about such a little thing as that?" demanded Ben; and then he ran down-stairs whistling cheerfully.

They would none of them understand that Phonse was not like other people, thought Cherry. Perhaps she herself would not have realized it if grandma had not impressed it so firmly upon her mind, and made her think so much of doing all that she could for him.

Another bond drew her to Phonse. Ben was a son of the house and Rhoda was a daughter, but she

and Phonse were waifs and strays. Phonse, an orphan from his babyhood, was the child of Grandpa Brewster's youngest son, who had run away from home when a boy, and had died young in the hard struggle to make his way as an artist; and Cherry was the child of the only daughter of the house, who had married against her father's will and had never been forgiven. Aunt Ruth, Uncle David's wife, had been very kind to them, but she had died just before grandma; if she had lived Cherry would never have felt upon her small shoulders the responsibility of standing between Phonse and the world. Now Loveday, who had been grandma's maid-of-all-work, was promoted to the position of house-keeper, and Rhoda thought she was "the lady of the house," and was gradually and in strict privacy (to avoid the jeers of the boys) taking the tucks out of her dresses.

Uncle David was a busy man. Besides managing his large farm he was president of the Byerly bank, and a director in several manufacturing companies. He was a justice of the peace, too, and all the townspeople called him Squire Brewster, and came to him to settle disputes, as if he were a judge. So it happened that he was not aware of Phonse's deficiencies, especially as Cherry, with her often misdirected zeal, was always at hand to screen them. Phonse and she were alone and poor, and at odds with the world; that was the feeling which Cherry sometimes permitted herself to cherish, especially when Rhoda was "aggravating," and it was in danger of making her morbid and self-conscious and miserable. She decided that she would go to meet Phonse on his way from school, and warn him of the questions he was going to be asked. She met Uncle David just coming out of the house.

"Has Phonse come home yet?" he asked her. "If

you have heard that he is likely to be asked questions about what he said to Preserved Gage the day he was hurt, don't say anything to him about it. I don't wish him to be confused by talk. I should have preferred to have him know nothing about the matter until he went to court, but as the whole town is talking of it, that is impossible." Uncle David frowned his strong disapproval of Byerly gossip. "Mind, I want to speak to him about it first myself."

There was nothing for Cherry to do but to sit down in the porch and wait. Uncle David had gone into his office, a little room with a window which gave upon the porch, and he would be likely to summon Phonse in there.

If one might only, with a care-free mind, go and witness the process of educating Simmy Backup's pig! She would even like to go and make up with Rhoda. That was never difficult, and there were no formalities. Rhoda would be a little dignified at first, and she might for some time after offer small reminders of the numerous times in their little differences when Cherry had been proven all in the wrong; but Cherry's kiss would be amiably received, and it was not unlikely that Rhoda would propose to make caramels; no one had such a "knack" at caramels as Rhoda, and Cherry was famous for a sweet tooth.

But there was Phonse at last, lagging along alone, as was his wont, and Cherry's heart was in her mouth.

Uncle David put his head out of the window as soon as he heard Phonse's voice.

"Phonse, do you remember seeing Preserved Gage the day he got hurt?" he asked, in an easy, careless way.

"Yes; I was sitting on the fence down there at the corner by the Bayberry church when he drove by. I

didn't know that he had got hurt then, though, so I didn't notice him much."

"Did he say anything to you?" asked Uncle David.

"I don't remember that he did. Oh yes, he did, too; he asked me what time it was by the Bayberry church clock."

"Did you tell him?" asked Uncle David.

"I—I don't know that I remember." Cherry's quick eyes saw a faint color rising to Phonse's tanned cheeks. "I suppose a fellow is likely to tell what time it is when he's asked."

"Do you happen to remember what time it was?" he asked.

"No, I don't," said Phonse. "I don't see what difference it can make."

"You are to go to court next week, and say just what you have said to me—all that you can remember about Preserved Gage's question and your answer," said Uncle David.

"But—but there isn't anything to tell," said Phonse. "I don't see what need there is of my going to court. I didn't tell him what time it was."

"But I thought you just said—"

"I said a fellow would be likely to, that's all I said," answered Phonse, in an aggrieved tone.

Uncle David uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Will you try to tell me the facts exactly as you remember them?" he said, judicially. "It has become a matter of importance."

"I don't see whose business it can be whether I told an old tin-peddler what time it was," grumbled Phonse, and he cast a glance of suspicion at Cherry. "I didn't tell him, anyway. I was cutting out an alder whistle, and I wasn't going to bother with him. I told him to look for himself. I didn't see why he should ask me

to tell him what time it was, with the clock right before his eyes. People are always expecting me to be eyes and ears for 'em, to say nothing of running my legs off. Old Gage grumbled out something, but I didn't listen to him. I happened to see Chissy Fenwick coming across the field just then, and I knew he was coming after me to go fishing, and I didn't think anything more about old Gage."

"It is as well to say no more about it," said Uncle David with decision. "Don't talk about it with any one, Phonse. All you will have to tell in court is simply what you have told me. Stick to the truth, and don't let any one confuse you into admitting anything else."

"What is it all about, Cherry?" asked Phonse, following Cherry from the porch down into the garden. "Why does Preserved Gage want to say that I told him what time it was?"

"He has sued the railroad company because the accident, he says, has made him blind and paralyzed, and the company can prove that he told Eli Perigo what time it was when he came by the Bayberry church that day: now, he says you told him. And oh, Phonse, if they should question you, so that it was necessary, you wouldn't mind, for the sake of saving Uncle David from losing a great deal of money—you wouldn't mind owning something that made you a little ashamed, would you? I don't think you need to mind at all. So many people—great men, too—can't do little easy things. I read the other day of a great philosopher who couldn't make change except by counting his fingers over and over, and there have been great authors who couldn't spell little simple words. Phonse, you will save Uncle David from being cheated by Preserved Gage, won't you?"

They were down in the kitchen-garden now, and Phonse was eating the great sour gooseberries, which they never tasted except when they "dared" each other, and he did not seem even to know that they were sour. He turned suddenly upon Cherry with flashing eyes.

"I don't know why you are not ashamed of yourselves, you and Rhoda, picking and spying upon a fellow! I used to think a good deal of you, Cherry Eastman, but I've found out that you're only just a girl! If there's anything that a fellow wants to keep still about, you have to talk it over. And I don't know what you're driving at, anyway." Phonse's voice, from being low and impressive in its suppressed anger, was becoming high-pitched and querulous. Cherry felt a certain relief in her distress at having him more like Phonse. "If I did happen to be a little near-sighted I don't know that it would be anybody's business, or anything to be ashamed of. If a girl had any sense she wouldn't talk to a fellow about being ashamed. You're *worse* than Rhoda!"

At this climax of accusation Cherry was quite overwhelmed.

"If Uncle David had confidence in me, I don't know why you need to worry. He told me to say just what I said to him, the truth, and so I shall. I thought at first that I wouldn't go, anyway, if I had to run away, but now I will go, just to show you that I'm not a fool, or a baby, and you needn't tell me what to say. I may run away afterwards—to sea. I think very likely I shall, and you'll be to blame. Now you needn't follow me," as he went through the orchard gate. "You'd better go over to Deacon Backup's barn, as you like to, and see a poor pig tormented. That's the kind of girl you are!" Cherry blushed with a guilty consciousness of her having had leanings towards the pig.

"He's quite an unusual pig, and it doesn't torment him in the least," she said, rallying to the defence of her tastes.

Phonse went through the orchard gate in dignified silence, and lay down on the grass under the trees. Cherry was afraid he was very angry. His voice had not been really steady since he had said that "if a girl had any sense she wouldn't talk to a fellow about being ashamed." She would have liked to tell him about the rabbits that Ben had for him, but that would be forestalling Ben, who loved dearly to give people pleasant surprises. Moreover, it was doubtful in what spirit Phonse would receive any communication from her just now. She had never known him to be so thoroughly angry with her before. His face was averted from her, but presently she discovered that he had taken out his old sketch-book and was drawing. When he could seek that consolation things were not going so very badly with Phonse. Cherry's spirits, which had an Indian-rubber-like capacity for rebounding from pressure, arose to such heights that she again felt the allurements of the pig-educating process, which might still be going on in Deacon Backup's barn.

She didn't go through the orchard, which was much the nearest way, but slipped around the corner of the carriage-house, and kept along by the stone wall, casting uneasy glances back at Phonse as long as it was possible for him to see her. Not that she was really ashamed of going; she said to herself that she wouldn't go if she were, but Phonse was so very severe upon people who aided or abetted in the education of pigs; and to have Phonse scornful of one was an unpleasant turning of the tables. Besides, perhaps it wasn't quite the thing. Rhoda wouldn't go.

Nevertheless, Cherry ran fast as soon as she was out



"THE PIG RAISED HIMSELF ON HIS HIND-LEGS AND SHOULDERED ARMS."

of Phonse's sight, and arrived, breathless, at Deacon Backup's barn just as the pig was concluding his famous barrel feat. He was a young and lean porker, and with all his porcine stolidity there was something of the merry fellow in his eye. In spite of the satisfaction of his trainers he could not yet be said to be a strikingly accomplished pig; it was with a grunting reluctance, and only after many urgent demands, that he raised himself upon his hind-legs; and whether he really shouldered arms, or merely allowed an old broom-handle to remain where it was put, was, like so many things in this world, a matter of opinion.

Cherry was warmly greeted, for it was a great pleasure to Simmy Backup and Ben to display the results of their training; and there was much lamentation that she had not come in time to witness the barrel act. Garibaldi steadfastly declined an encore, so she was obliged to take the testimony of Jacky Batterson, who was called upon as a disinterested spectator, and who declared it was "better'n the circus," and of Ben, who seriously avowed his opinion that Garibaldi "had a great future."

"There's another girl! If I was you I wouldn't have 'em. Garibaldi 'll never do anything when they begin to come," said Jacky Batterson, dispassionately.

The other girl had pushed open the door at the opposite end of the long barn from the scene of Garibaldi's feats. The space was of sufficient width to admit her very slender person, but not wide enough for her very large hat, which she unconcernedly allowed to be crushed and torn by a projecting nail. She wore a skimpy and faded calico dress, and her complexion and eyes, and even her wispy hair, had the same faded and unprosperous appearance; but in spite of this she had an air of vigor and determination, to which a decidedly prominent chin gave emphasis.

"I'm in the tin-peddlin' business," she announced. "Have your folks got any rags?"

"Who ever heard of a girl tin-peddler?" said Jacky Batterson. "Of course you can't be one, Dilly Gage. People wouldn't buy of you. And you couldn't get a license, anyway."

"I guess I've got a right to get a livin' the best way I can, now father's took blind and paralyzed," said the girl, defiantly. "Squire Brewster, that owns the railroad that run into father, has got to pay for it. He's got to pay all the money he's got. I expect nothin' but what you'll be town's poor, for all you feel so big, Cherry Eastman; and you wouldn't be smart enough to go tin-peddlin' like me. Have your folks got any rags?" A sudden change of tone and a little anxious frown accompanied the last sentence.

Cherry's temper was a little disturbed. She did not see why Dilly Gage should attack her so fiercely. They had once gone to school together, and whenever she had led in a spelling-match she had chosen Dilly, who was a famous speller, the first one, ignoring both the claims of friendship and social distinctions which influenced most of the girls. But since Cherry had been promoted to the Academy, and Dilly's school-days were over, they had seldom met. Cherry would have quite forgotten her if she had not occasionally seen her going by with berries to sell; or, sometimes, a string of trout from Roaring Brook, beside which she and her father lived in a little tumble-down house. But Dilly looked so poor and forlorn now that Cherry's anger was checked. "Loveday sold them last week to the new tin-peddler from Dayton. But we'll save them for you after this, Dilly."

The girl's face softened a little, although she murmured an unpleasant opinion of people who traded

with the new tin-peddler. "I'll be round again week after next. I can't come next week, 'cause I'm a-goin' to court. I say, you can jest tell that girly-lookin' cousin of yours that it won't be a mite of use for him to tell lies about tellin' father the time of day that afternoon that he was hurt, 'cause he was overheard. There's a man come forrard that was goin' by, and that heard him say it as plain as could be. He's a stranger in Byerly, and was stoppin' at the hotel, and as soon as he heard about it he come forrard to testify, jest 'cause he didn't want to see poor folks wronged."

The boys all hurried to the barn door to see Dilly mount her wagon. It was somewhat dilapidated, and old Jane looked bony and drooping. But the tin-ware was bright, and arranged with a view to display, and old Jane plucked up heart under Dilly's encouraging chirrups, and went off in fine style, with a great clatter of tins.

Dilly chirruped old Jane along at a lively pace so long as they were in the highway. As soon as they turned into the woods road, that led to the Roaring Brook settlement, she drew her up under the shade of a tree.

"Now rest your bones, you poor old cretur!" she said. "We're obligated to put on some style while we're among folks; but down here among the squirrels and things that's real well acquainted with us there ain't no need. She was dretful pretty-spoken to me, Cherry Eastman was. I expect she thinks she'd better be, knowin' what's a-comin'. She wa'n't never like some that treated me as if I was the dirt under their feet, and I'm kind of sorry I sarced her. I don't hate them girls so bad, now I don't go to school with 'em. I used to envy 'em the good times that never come nigh me. There was the time I coaxed father to let me go to

Sunday-school. I calc'lated they'd let me go to the festival if I went every Sunday. The teacher she made a sight of me, and the girls was orfle polite, and kep' passin' me their Bibles 'n' little books that they learned out of till I had a whole stack of 'em; but I ketched one of 'em snickerin' behind my back. I was all dressed up, too, in old Mis' Fickett's red shawl and Cally Bumpus's bonnet with a pink feather, and I don't know what she was laughin' at. And I sarced her, and the teacher told me to keep still, and I said 'I guess I'm as good as you be!' And if the lesson wa'n't all about how when folks make a feast they'd ought to ask poor folks to it. And, thinks I, now there'll be dif'runt doin's in Byerly; they'll be invitin' the Roarin' Brook folks to their good times. But land! it didn't seem to mean nothin' at all. I guess they'll treat me dif'runt when we get Squire Brewster's money! But if—if anyhow it could happen that it wa'n't honest for us to have the money" ; the leaven in the lump of covetousness and envy that sometimes might seem to be all there was of poor Dilly's half-savage nature was working strongly—"if it wa'n't right and didn't b'long to us, I wouldn't have it nohow!"

CHAPTER III.

"I DON'T see why there's any need of my going," said Phonse, for about the tenth time. He was sitting on the porch, whittling to keep his courage up, while they waited for the carriage to be brought around. His heroism had apparently all evaporated with his anger against Cherry; more entirely than that, for he still maintained a dignified reserve towards her, and



"'NOW REST YOUR BONES, YOU POOR OLD CRETUR.'"

Cherry was reduced to such a submissive state that she continued to do his examples for him without further protest, though with many pangs of conscience. Miss Peckett, the teacher, a slow and gentle little person, had not apparently been affected by Rhoda's hints. Every day Cherry expected that Rhoda would feel it to be her duty to tell her suspicions, and sometimes she said to herself, desperately, that she wished she would. But Rhoda's mind was quite taken up with the novel excitement of going to court.

"I should have told papa just why I wanted to go, if he had made any objection," she said to Cherry. "Indeed, I've tried to tell him two or three times that I knew a reason why Preserved Gage *couldn't* be telling the truth, but he has always shut me up. He's quite cross about our talking about it. He's so worried, poor papa, that he doesn't stop to consider that I shouldn't say anything about it, after he had bade me not, without a very good reason ; so I was determined to go. And if things don't go right, if Phonse doesn't own up, as he ought, I intend to hop right up in my seat, wherever I may be, and say, quite loud, Phonse can't—"

"Oh, Rhoda, do keep still!" cried Cherry. "Phonse feels dreadfully about going; he's as pale as can be this morning. It wouldn't take anything to make him say he wouldn't go, and make a scene, or run away, or something dreadful."

And Rhoda obeyed the monition, and kept still. She was full of suppressed excitement, and it was quite evident that she had planned to be the heroine of the occasion. With all her quiet primness Rhoda had a decided taste for being the centre of attraction. She had indulged in many vivid mental pictures of the scene in the court-room when she should arise and make her

disclosure. Rhoda was not hard-hearted or unpitying, but she had a strong conviction that it would be much better for people to do as she thought they ought to; if they did not, they must expect to be punished. She meant to do right, and she forgot that there might be errors of judgment on her part—a characteristic very common among fifteen-year-olds, and not unknown among older people.

Cherry was not going to court with any pleasant anticipations. She was anxious about Phonse; she could not forget what Dilly Gage had said about a man who was going to testify that he heard Phonse tell her father what time it was. Perhaps it was a story that Dilly Gage had "made up." She had racked her brains to remember whether Dilly was truthful at school. The generally accepted idea in the town was that all the people in the Roaring Brook settlement were destitute of "a taste exact for actual fact," but Cherry had a lingering impression that Dilly Gage could be expected to tell the truth. She had passed a sleepless night—perhaps the very first one in her life—and there were dark circles about her eyes as she came out onto the porch, in her pretty white dress and her hat with a wild-rose wreath. This was the first time, too, that there had been not the least satisfaction in putting on that hat.

Rhoda was looking very serious and preoccupied. She was rehearsing over and over in her mind the dramatic sensation which she expected to create in court. She was not quite certain whether she ought not to preface her announcement by some form of address to the audience or the judge, such as "Ladies and gentlemen," or "Your Honor." For a week she had been gathering all the information possible about the proceedings in court, but her ideas were still somewhat

vague. She had decided that she should be summoned to the witness-stand and obliged to take an oath. She thought that would be quite thrilling, and was sure that she should not feel in the least abashed. But there was one little difficulty that troubled her; that was the possibility, just the bare possibility, that she was mistaken; that Phonse was only afflicted by a peculiar kind of near-sightedness. Rhoda was very conscientious about telling the exact truth. She had driven Phonse to exasperation by bringing him old books of grandpa's, for which she had burrowed deeply into musty and dusty piles in the attic, and in which the print was very small, and rendered almost illegible by time, to see if he could read them.

"I don't know what Rhoda's up to now, but I expect you and she will soon be able to prove, between you, that I can't read," he had said fiercely to Cherry. And Cherry had gone and quarrelled miserably about the books with Rhoda, who was especially aggravating in her strong sense of rectitude, and threw out mysterious hints of the way in which she meant to save the day for the railroad company.

"I don't see why there's any need of my going," Phonse said again, as Rhoda stepped nimbly to the back seat of the carriage. "If Preserved Gage has been paralyzed by the accident the company will have to pay, whether he's blind or not. Besides, who is going to prove that he may not have grown blind since that day, if he wasn't then?"

"If he's pretending about one he probably is about the other," said Rhoda. "No one will believe people who pretend at all."

Uncle David was attending to the horses, and made no answer. He would not be beguiled into saying anything about the matter; although he had evidently

given up in despair the attempt to keep the young people from talking about it. Cherry gathered from his manner that he expected Preserved Gage to triumph; she wondered whether he had heard of Dilly Gage's assertion that a man was to testify to overhearing the conversation between her father and Phonse; she thought perhaps Ben had told him; but in fact Ben had been too much absorbed in Simmy Backup's pig to listen to Dilly's conversation, it not having occurred to him that it could be of the least importance.

Cherry felt irritated against Rhoda for looking so complacent and happy, but in truth Rhoda was not without a pang of pity when she looked at Phonse's pale and dejected face, and only fortified herself by reflecting that it was much better for him to be told of it. Cherry, too, really ought to be brought to a realizing sense of the evils of deceit. She was not sure that there would be any occasion for her to tell of that other worse deceit of Phonse's, in which Cherry was a partner, but if it should be necessary she did not mean to shrink from the painful duty. She called it a painful duty to herself, and if she had an underlying satisfaction in the thought that her own virtue would shine very brightly by contrast in the eyes of a great roomful of people, it was probably only a vague feeling of which she was hardly conscious.

Chelmsborough was a most delightful town, with a bustling little main street, which had on one side a common where boys played leap-frog, and where there was always a great flower-show and a great baby-show in fine weather, and on the other side a row of fascinating shops, from Meadows & Hill's, at one end, with its windows full of loveliest laces and ribbons and muslins, to Miss Cratchett's toy and candy shop at the other end, where there was a little jingling bell on the

door, and when you went in no living thing was visible for a long time except a tiny dog, exactly like a toy himself, all fluff and lungs, who was supposed to keep the shop and be a terror to evil-doers.

It seemed sad and strange to have come to Chelmsborough with no interest in the shops. Ben, who had too many pressing interests at home to care to go to court, and who was "afraid, anyway, that he should pitch into anybody who tried to make out that old Gage wasn't a fraud," had, indeed, sent for some fish-hooks of a new-fashioned kind, and for the *Trapper's Guide* from the book-store, but Uncle David would not stop for them now, and it was doubtful whether any one would remember them again.

The court-house was in a green square; a low building, with elm branches interlaced above it, and all about it so quiet and drowsy that it seemed as if Justice, poised above the door, in spite of her uncomfortable position and the weight of her brass scales, might have gone to sleep.

Rhoda felt a disappointing conviction that there was not going to be any one there, but, once inside, the corridor was found to be full of men talking in low tones; and two or three wagons drove up and deposited their freight at the door—chiefly Byerly farmers, some with their "women-folks," in Sunday attire and with a holiday air. Mrs. Deacon Backup even had a "pink posy" made of pinks and southernwood, as if she were going to church.

Dilly Gage came driving up triumphantly in a high top buggy, with "little Ketchum," as Uncle David called him, her father's lawyer from Winfield. He was a very small man, with a bald head as round as a bullet, and a shrewd face with a little mocking smile always lurking about the corners of the mouth, which

was supposed to be very disconcerting to a witness. Dilly had borrowed Cally Bumpus's bonnet, with its perennial pink feather, as on the memorable occasion when she went to Sunday-school, and her pride in it was in nowise lessened by the fact that velvet is not a popular wear in June; and old Mrs. Fickett's red shawl testified to the neighborly feeling which prevailed in the Roaring Brook settlement. Dilly's face showed small traces of doubts or misgivings; she was evidently convinced that the day of her triumph over "folks that had thought she wa'n't no more 'n the dirt under their feet" had almost come. She returned a mocking smile and a little toss of her head to Phonse's quite unconscious but very fierce scowl.

The court-room gradually filled. The green curtains were lowered to shut out the heat of the sun, and an air of solemnity prevailed. Cherry thought the jury looked astonishingly easy and indifferent. She had heard with surprise a man who seemed to be a lawyer say to another, "*Only* an action for damages against a railroad." There were two Byerly men on the jury. Deacon Backup was one, and Cherry saw him with a sudden sense of security. He was such a good man; no injustice could triumph, she thought, when so good a man as Deacon Backup had anything to do with the matter. The other side had not challenged him, although little Ketchum knew well that he was a friend as well as neighbor of Uncle David's. No one was afraid that Deacon Backup would be anything but true, though it were to his own hurt.

But yet, after all, it might be easier for Phonse if there were no friends and neighbors there; he might be less ashamed.

There were four or five doctors. Dr. Lunt, of Great Warrington, who was eminent in his profession, Cherry

heard it whispered, was for the defence; but, then, there was Dr. Spence, of Winfield, of almost equal reputation, who was to testify in Preserved Gage's favor. And Dr. Wallace, their own Byerly doctor, who had been doubtful, was now reported to have declared the tin-peddler a humbug. The preliminaries seemed interminable. When at last they came to the deposition of Preserved Gage, so clear a case seemed made out that Cherry thought the railroad company might as well pay him the money without more ado. The distinguished doctor from Winfield testified that the tin-peddler was almost totally blind, and paralyzed in one side of his body beyond all hope of recovery, and these afflictions were undoubtedly due to his having been struck by the train on the Byerly Branch Railroad on the afternoon of March 24th. Then several witnesses testified that the keeper had failed to wave his red flag, being at that moment engaged in thrashing Tripp Watkins, who had "called him names."

The defence simply declared that Preserved Gage was, beyond a few scratches, quite unhurt, and was feigning his afflictions, of which he had not complained until a day or two after the accident. And to prove that he had not, as he claimed, been immediately rendered almost sightless, Eli Perigo was brought forward to testify that he had told him, at the cross-road, that it was "just nineteen minutes past three when he came by the Bayberry church."

Rhoda had begun to feel that their part in the affair was disappointingly small; it seemed unlikely that the testimony of a boy like Phonse would have much weight, and she thought all the signs pointed to Preserved Gage's triumph. Dilly thought so, too; she had testified with quite a thrilling effect how her father, when he came home that day, had cried out to her:

"Come and help me, Dilly! It's all dark ahead of me! I can't hardly see a mite."

It was quite evident that Dilly's testimony made an impression upon the audience. The jury looked so provokingly impassive that it was impossible to judge whether they were affected by it or not.

After Eli Perigo came another physician, who testified that paralysis occurring nearly three months after the accident could not by any means be proven to be a result of it. And then he described the disease in learned and technical terms, especially that phase of it with which the tin-peddler was afflicted, and testified strongly to his opinion that it was not caused by the accident. And now things seemed to promise favorably for the defence. How perplexed that jury must be! Cherry, who had a leaning towards women's rights views, caught herself indulging a hope that they might never be so far attained to, in her time, that she should have to be a jury-woman. And now the defence rested its case, and there came an intermission for dinner. Would they never get to Phonse? Cherry began to hope that they would settle the case without him. There was a long and tedious dinner at the hotel, where it was astonishing to see Uncle David eat as calmly, and with apparently as good an appetite, as if nothing whatever were happening, and still more astonishing to see the lawyers and doctors all hobnobbing and cracking jokes together, as if they had not just been giving each other sharpest thrusts, and implying that those who disagreed with them were either fools or villains! No one at the table seemed to have any anxiety or personal feeling about the case except Dilly Gage, and she could eat three kinds of pie and ice-cream, but "made faces," whenever an opportunity offered, at Phonse. The jury, all by themselves in an inner room, seemed to

be having the best of times. Every time a waiter opened the door a roar of laughter was heard, and once Cherry caught sight of Deacon Backup's face almost apoplectic with laughter. It seemed to her very heartless and unsympathetic to be taking things so lightly, and her faith even in Deacon Backup was a little shaken.

But back in the court-room once more, everybody was grave and solemn again, and the first evidence which the claimant's counsel offered in rebuttal was the written testimony of Preserved Gage that "one Alphonse Brewster, nephew of Squire David Brewster, had told him what time it was.

And then the counsel for the defence called Phonse to the witness-stand.

"No, I didn't tell him," said Phonse, after he had taken the oath, and looking very pale and nervous. He looked graceful and elegant, too, even more than usual, Cherry thought; and she thought, also, that his little air of distinction, as well as his height, made him look older than he was. "He asked me what time it was, but I didn't tell him."

"Relate the circumstance as you remember it," said the lawyer, who was their own lawyer, Philipson, of Byerly, a kindly old man whom they had known all their lives.

"I was sitting on the fence, whittling out an alder whistle," said Phonse, "and I told him to look for himself, I wasn't going to be bothered with him. And just then I saw Chissy Fenwick coming after me to go fishing, and I didn't think anything more about Preserved Gage. I didn't know he'd been hurt or anything. I didn't get down from the fence; I didn't go near his wagon."

"That is all," said Lawyer Philipson.

But Lawyer Ketchum promptly recalled Phonse for cross-examination.

"You say you didn't tell the old man what time it was?" said the lawyer.

"No, sir, I didn't," said Phonse, firmly.

"Aren't you in the habit of telling a man what time it is when he asks you?"

Phonse hesitated.

"No, I'm not," he said at length.

"Queer for an amiable boy to refuse so slight a favor as that, isn't it?" said the lawyer.

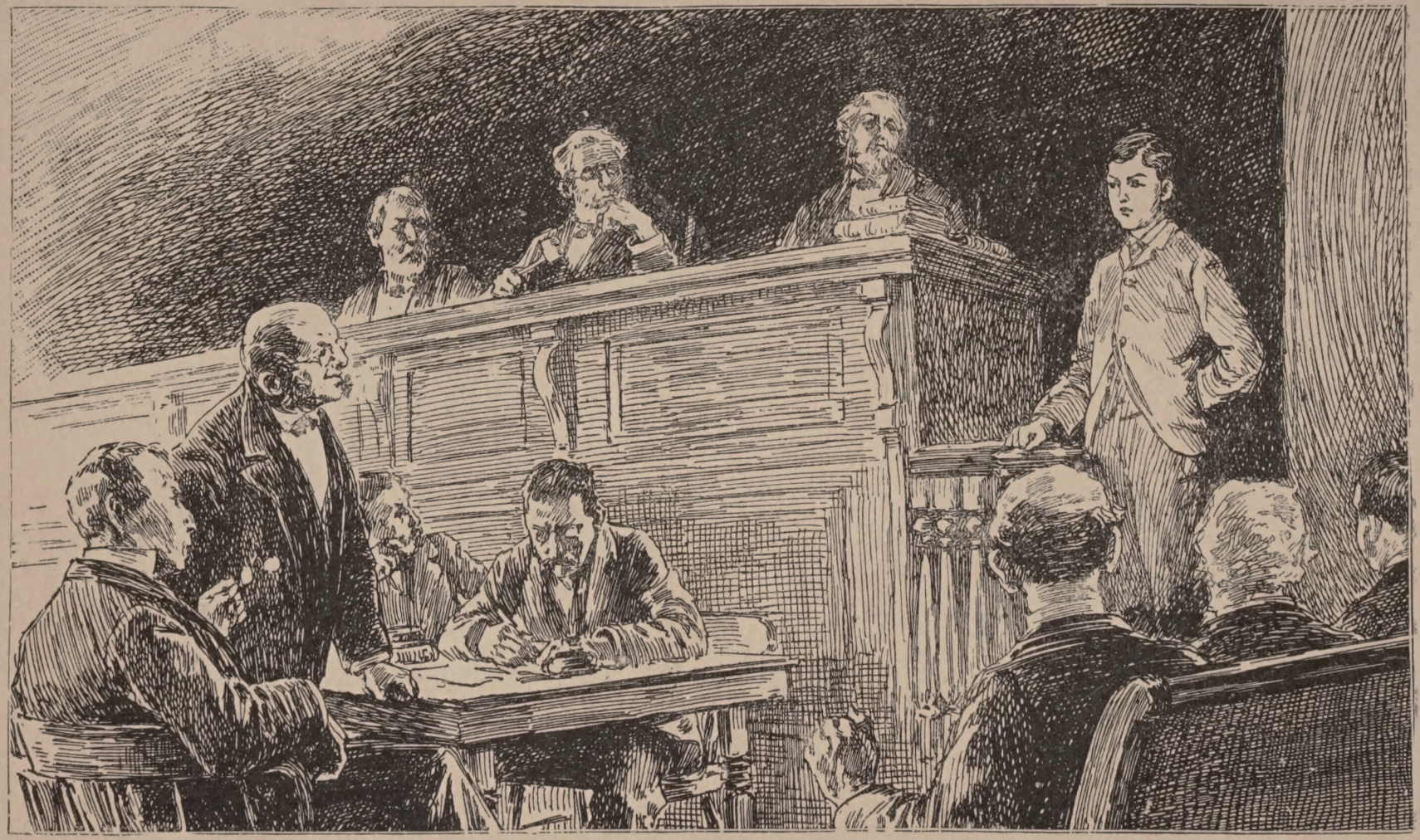
"I'm not an amiable boy," said Phonse, with some eagerness in his voice. "Anybody will tell you that." And a little titter ran over the room, promptly suppressed by the judge.

"You didn't look at the clock, did you? It seems to me natural for a boy to look at a clock when he is asked what time it is by it. You were sitting on the fence with your back to the clock, and you didn't turn your head?"

"I don't know whether I looked at the clock or not," said Phonse, slowly. "I must have turned my head, because I saw Chissy Fenwick coming across the field."

"Oh, he was coming from that direction, was he?" said the lawyer, with an air of having made a discovery. And Cherry could see that Uncle David looked annoyed; he evidently thought Phonse need not have made that admission; and yet he had told him to tell the exact truth. "Then, of course, you had turned to look at the clock when you saw him. Now jog your memory a little; don't you think it highly probable, since you looked at the clock, that you told him what time it was?"

"No, sir," said Phonse, "I didn't tell him what time it was."



"'RELATE THE CIRCUMSTANCE AS YOU REMEMBER IT,' SAID THE LAWYER."

There was a calm positiveness about Phonse's denial which Cherry thought must impress every one.

"Now, come, come!" said little Ketchum, with an easy, affable air: "Tell us just how it was and save time. I am going to put a man onto the stand"—the lawyer waved his hand towards a young man whom Cherry had seen at the table in the hotel, and whom she recognized as a commercial traveller who sold goods occasionally at the Byerly store—"a man who will testify that he was driving along the road while the tin-peddler on his wagon had stopped, and you were sitting on the fence, whittling, and he distinctly heard you say, 'It's nineteen minutes past three by the clock, but that old clock is never right!"

Phonse started. Cherry saw him; every one saw him, and there was a decided sensation in the court-room.

CHAPTER IV.

Rhoda felt that the time had come to make the great sensation which she had planned, but the conscientious difficulty, which seemed slight at first, had now grown too great to be overcome. The solemnity of the oath which the witnesses were obliged to take had impressed her, as Sidney Smith remarked that it did impress some people, with the idea that there were two kinds of truth. Sometimes she felt quite certain that what she wished to tell was true, but in view of that awful oath the slight possibility of mistake loomed to a great size. What if Phonse had only a peculiar near-sightedness with reference to clocks and watches? And to say what one *thought* would probably have no effect whatever. So Rhoda deliberated and dared not,

while the lawyer paused, evidently gratified at the effect he had produced. People were looking at each other all over the court-room, and Cherry even caught a flickering smile on the face of one of the impassive jurymen.

"Now you see you had merely forgotten. I thought if I should jog your memory a little it would be all right," said Lawyer Ketchum, with an easy air of having settled the matter. "Now you are willing to admit that you said, 'It's nineteen minutes past three, but that old clock is never right,' aren't you?"

"No, I am not. I didn't say it," said Phonse, but his tone was slow and hesitating. He looked about the audience, and then turned his gaze to the jury, and then it slowly wandered back to Uncle David's anxious face. Every one was becoming impatient; it was evident that Phonse had not made a favorable impression. The lawyer was apparently satisfied with this, and was about to tell him to step down, when Phonse straightened himself up, and an expression came into his face which Rhoda thought, with amazement, made him look quite unlike Phonse. Cherry remembered to have seen him look like that once before; it was when Tripp Watkins, the village bully, was tormenting little Caleb Backup. Phonse was fond of little Caleb, as he was of all children, and he had thrashed the bully; it was quite wonderful, for he was delicate and hated to fight, but he had tripped him up with great agility, and the bully, being heavy and clumsy, was at a disadvantage which he could not overcome. And before he thrashed Tripp Watkins Cherry remembered that Phonse looked just as he looked now.

"If you want to know just why I didn't tell Preserved Gage what time it was I'll tell you," he said, in a resolute voice: "It was because I can't tell time."

There was another titter—this time a louder one—and only half-smothered exclamations of incredulity all over the room.

"Oh, it's true! it's true!" cried a voice, which rang out clear and strong above the noise. Cherry had leaped upon her seat, and, with her face in a flame, was waving her hand frantically, as they did in the Byerly grammar-school when they wished to be heard. "It's quite true! I found it out long ago, and Rhoda knows it too, but I—I knew he didn't like to have us know it, and so I never—"

There was a sharp rapping for order, and Cherry, who had been carried quite out of herself, came back to reality, conscious only, as she afterwards confided to Ben, of a strong wish that "the earth might open and let her go through to China." It was evident that she had done a dreadful thing; Lawyer Ketchum was very angry, and the judge said, in a very severe tone, something which she did not catch. And Uncle David said, in his sternest way, "I shouldn't have allowed you to come if I hadn't supposed you knew how to behave with ordinary propriety." And from behind Cherry came a voice—a woman's voice—calling her "a bold little piece."

"Oh, how could you do it?" whispered Rhoda. "Every one is looking at us!"

She really felt very much aggrieved at Cherry's action. She reflected, with complacency, that she had had too much common-sense to do such a thing, although it had occurred to her. If she had, she would have done it in the right time, not after Phonse had told and there was no need of it. It was just like Cherry to be so blundering. Lawyer Ketchum turned to Phonse with his most sarcastic smile.

"So you can't tell time, eh? Well, that is an idea,

isn't it! a boy of your age! You can't read numbers, I take it—not even as far as twelve. And that was another of the things about which you're forgetful, isn't it? You didn't say so at first."

"I didn't say so at first because—because a fellow doesn't like to own that he's queer like that, and can't do a thing that everybody else can do, that little bits of children can do."

Phonse was very patient and dignified, although he scowled frightfully. "But I can do some things that other people can't. I can draw—"

"You say you can't read numbers," interrupted Lawyer Ketchum. "Didn't you ever go to school?"

"Of course I go to school," answered Phonse, "and I didn't say I couldn't read numbers. I can if I stop to think a while, but the spaces in between on a clock bother me. Of course I could add 'em up if I wanted to, but it takes me a good while, and it *plagues* me; it makes me ill."

Phonse's voice was growing shrill and high-keyed. It was evidently a great strain, though perhaps no one but Cherry knew how great, to confess his defect before all these people—for Phonse, who had so much vanity, and never could bear to "own up" to anything!

Cherry stole a glance at Uncle David. She wanted him to appreciate the sacrifice that Phonse was making, and she was afraid he would not. She could not discover anything in his face except the deepest perplexity. She had often heard him say that he "didn't know what to make of that boy," and she could fancy that he was saying it to himself now with a deeper meaning than ever.

Lawyer Ketchum hesitated for a moment, evidently in doubt as to what line of questioning would soonest

confound the witness. Utter contempt and ridicule of the witness's claim seemed to him the reasonable and proper course, but he had been quick enough to detect a rising current of sympathy with Phonse among his hearers. It might be strange, it might be ridiculous, but the boy had an air of simple truthfulness which, as none knew better than cunning Lawyer Ketchum, carried weight with it. Moreover, the story bore a probability of truth, from the fact that, as Lawyer Ketchum afterwards admitted, no one would have "put the boy up to tell such an absurd thing, and he never would have thought of it himself."

But the fact that the lawyer immediately believed Phonse to be telling the truth did not prevent him from trying to force some contradictory or damaging admission from him.

"You say you go to school. Do you study arithmetic?" he demanded, again opening fire upon Phonse, with the air of being able to annihilate him in a very short time.

"Yes, sir, I study arithmetic," answered Phonse.

"In the lowest class?"

"No, sir; I'm in the second class."

"With the little boys, I suppose?"

"No, sir; the boys are about as old as I am."

"Are you at the foot of the class?"

"No, sir; I'm number seven," answered Phonse. "There are six above me, and eight below me."

"Ah-h! then you seem to be a fairly good scholar in arithmetic. Been through fractions, I suppose, and perhaps square root? Yes? And yet you can't tell time! Ha, ha! Well, that is a great joke."

"I've been through cube root," announced Phonse, calmly, "and through some of the hardest parts of C——'s mental arithmetic."

"You can solve difficult arithmetical problems, and yet you can't read the numerals on a clock?"

"I can read 'em after a while," explained Phonse; it's putting them together that puzzles me. And then I don't do the examples; Cherry does them. She's my cousin, you know—Cherry Eastman. She's an orfle square girl; she's the squarest girl that ever was." Phonse looked around with his fiercest frown, as if he were challenging every one to doubt it. And she hasn't wanted to do my arithmetic for me; she says it's mean and cheating; but I've made her. She's done it ever since I was a little fellow, and that's how I've got along. She's written the explanations all out for me. If I'd tried hard I could have learned, I suppose; but such things are too stupid when a fellow can draw as I can."

"Oh, Cherry, what will you do? It is dreadful that he should have to say it right out before everybody!" whispered Rhoda. "And people who don't know us may think it is I. I think he ought to have said that it was the large one with the turn-up nose!"

But Cherry was almost forgetting to be ashamed in her pride in and sympathy for Phonse. And the burden seemed rolled off, like Christian's, with confession. Every one knew, and not she but Phonse had told! And how bravely he had shielded her. She wanted to jump up again and cry out that he had taken too much of the blame, that she had begun to help him too much when he was too little to realize that it was not honest; but the terrors of her first public utterance were still strong enough upon her to prevent her from repeating it. Uncle David would not look at her; she was not sure whether she most wished or feared that he would. But his eyes were fixed upon Phonse.

Lawyer Ketchum was sneering at and "badgering"

Phonse, until first the defendant's counsel and then the judge interposed; and then Phonse was allowed to step down, and Lawyer Ketchum put upon the stand the commercial traveller, a young man with a most honest face and air, who stoutly affirmed that he had heard Phonse say to the tin-peddler, "It's nineteen minutes past three, but that old clock is never right!" He positively identified Phonse; he said he observed him because he was so handsome, and could have picked him out among a thousand. He also observed him because he was making an alder whistle, just such as he used to make when he was a boy, and he hadn't seen or thought of one for as much as twenty years. When he drove by there was no other boy in sight.

And then the testimony was said to be all in, and each lawyer made a short argument for his client, in which he strenuously claimed every particle of proof for his side, and demolished the evidence upon the other side until it was quite wonderful that any one should think there had been any. Lawyer Ketchum said that the claim of a boy of thirteen that he could not tell time was too absurd to dwell upon. He was willing to rely upon the clear and concise evidence of his witness, who had overheard him, to offset that. But he laid the greatest stress upon the medical testimony, which he claimed had proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the terrible condition to which his client had been reduced was the direct result of the accident. Lawyer Philipson was even briefer, but he claimed that Preserved Gage had been proven guilty of a scheme to extort money from the railroad on false pretences; he had been able to go home entirely unaided; he had told no one that day that his eyesight was affected except his daughter, whose testimony should not have been allowed; and it was quite evident that he had

been able to see what time it was by a clock on a church-steeple forty rods distant. He thought there was no doubt that Phonse would be believed rather than the strange witness, who, he strongly insinuated, had been hired to testify. And then he dwelt lightly upon the fact that Phonse was known in Byerly as a boy of peculiar organization, of talent in some directions, and somewhat defective in others. Then the judge said a few words to the jury, by which Cherry was surprised to find that he did not tell them in the least what he thought about it, but only what the law was, and what kind of evidence they were to regard as weighty, and what not; and, altogether, he seemed to think about as much of one side as of the other; and Cherry wondered how, if the judge couldn't make up his mind, the jury were going to! And then she grew very much mortified, and felt all eyes upon her again, for he said that they were to entirely ignore any irregular communications or expressions of sympathy from the audience, and to give no credence whatever to any testimony that was not given on the witness-stand under the sanctity of an oath. Cherry felt herself the guiltiest person in the universe; it was so terrible that people should be openly told not to believe her! But after he had got through talking to the jury, and they had retired, looking just as matter-of-fact and impassive as ever, what did the judge do but look down at her, over his uncommonly round and very judicial-looking glasses, and smile most benignly. Every one saw it, and Cherry was quite consoled, for he wouldn't have done that, she thought, if he believed she had told a lie. In this queer place no one, it seemed, said what he thought, and it appeared to Cherry that the law was only an arrangement for twisting and tangling things up so that no one could understand them.

With a kind of awful wonder she looked at the commercial traveller who had told a lie. How had he dared to do it after taking that solemn oath? Probably he had been hired to do it, as Lawyer Philipson had suggested. She believed it was "an orfle wicked world," as Loveday was always saying, and she wished she were safely back at Flying Hill Farm, where at least people were not so incomprehensibly bad, and it was, after all, much easier to know how one ought to behave than it was in a court-room.

People were walking about the court-room and talking. Uncle David had left them in their seats and was talking with some friends. They all saw with indignation that he was just as affable with little Ketchum as with any one else.

"If I were a little stronger I'd punch his head," said Phonse; the first words he had uttered since he left the witness-stand. "Ben can do it for me, anyway; he's only a little fellow: and Ben will."

Rhoda had been reflecting deeply, and she now said, with a grand air:

"The trouble with you and Cherry is that you are too personal. You must try not to be so personal. And whatever you feel about people you must pretend that you don't feel anyway. That is the way to be polite, like society people."

"You got that stuff out of a book, you know you did," growled Phonse, who was in one of his worst humors. "You're as bad as a manners-book, anyway. Cherry and I don't want to be humbugs."

It was "we" again with Phonse; he had apparently forgiven her; and she was so glad that she had refrained from expressing her opinion that it *was* a great pity to dislike people, because it made one so unhappy. She couldn't really see how Phonse could help disliking

Lawyer Ketchum; and though the desire to punch his head was certainly not a laudable one, and his manner of expressing himself not adapted to polite society, Cherry could not find it in her heart to blame him much.

People came up and stared at them, and a few who were brave enough not to be deterred by Phonse's frowning aspect asked them some questions.

Dilly Gage, at the other side of the room, was holding quite a reception. She chattered freely with all questioners, and was evidently arousing much sympathy. Her high, shrill tones rose above all the noises of the room. Dilly always talked to the squirrels and partridges in the Roaring Brook woods when she could find no more satisfactory audience; to the swallows in the eaves, and especially to Cally Bumpus's cat. Now, in her excitement, and with this large and apparently appreciative audience, she was in her element.

"Land! ain't that young one got a gift of gab!" they heard one old countrywoman say. "Seems as if she'd been wound up so 's 't she could run on forever: and I expect it's every word true. If her father's a-makin' it she don't know, and she'd be dretful likely to."

"I don't think that girl ought to be allowed to go on like that," said Rhoda, as soon as the woman had passed them. "Of course it can't make any difference about the verdict now, but I know she is telling all sorts of wrong stories about us. She's perfectly horrid, and she ought to be put out of the hall." Rhoda's little doll-like face was all aflame with anger.

"Whatever you feel about people you must pretend that you don't feel anyway," mimicked Phonse, catching Rhoda's soft thin notes with provoking exactness.

"Of course that Roaring Brook set are not like other people," said Rhoda. "No one can help being

perfectly disgusted with them, and it doesn't matter if one does show that one is. How ridiculous it would be if those Gages should get all that money! They wouldn't know what to do with it. Twenty thousand dollars they claim now."

"I shouldn't wonder if they found out what to do with it before we found out what to do without it," said Cherry, sagely.

And then Phonse said he "wasn't going to stay there to be made a monkey-show of any longer," and went off to a secluded corner where he could look out of a window where there was a glimpse through green boughs of the stuffed birds in the museum which was Chelmsborough's pride.

The first half-hour of comment and speculation after the retirement of the jury had passed very quickly, but now time was dragging heavily. Many people had left and others were waiting "only just five or ten minutes more." A man was heard to base his opinion that they wouldn't be out much longer on the fact that "Bill Judkins, one of the jurymen, had got to get in his hay, and he'd fetch 'em to time."

And apparently his faith in Bill Judkins was not misplaced, for very soon after there was a commotion about the judge's bench, and a call to order, and the jury came in. The crowd would not be quiet, and the foreman's answer to the questions asked him failed to reach the audience until it was repeated from lip to lip, in the midst of a whirlwind of mingled approval and censure.

The claimant, Preserved Gage, was awarded damages to the amount of one dollar.

As soon as it was fully understood there was a cheer for the railroad company. It seemed to Cherry that every one wanted to shake hands with Uncle David

and with them, even some of those who had apparently been on the tin-peddler's side.

"Why should they award him any damages?" said Rhoda. "It sounds as if they believed in him a little."

"It's a matter of form. He was struck by the train, you know," said Uncle David, who was actually showing his satisfaction a little.

"It's jest a-jeerin' at folks!" Dilly was crying out. "They hadn't no business to do it." She was almost hysterical, and some kindly disposed women were trying to calm her. "Poor folks can't never get their rights, and it ain't a mite of use for 'em to try. Oh, how be I a-goin' to tell father? If 'twas anybody but them Brewsters I could have bore it better—with their white dresses every day, and like enough sashes, too. But I'll pay 'em up yet! They'd better look out!"

The court-room was speedily cleared, and Dilly's excited threats were lost in the general commotion. It was a great relief to get into the carriage and be whirled away from the clamor in the peaceful twilight atmosphere.

Uncle David put his hand upon Phonse's shoulder. "You did well; you did bravely, Phonse!" he said. And that was as much from Uncle David as a whole volume of extravagant praise from any one else. "And you, Cherry, perhaps I was a little hard upon you. Of course you hadn't the least right to say anything; you ought to have known that; but since you wished to help my case—and I think it did have an effect upon the jury."

"I didn't think of the case then, at all, Uncle David," said Cherry, candidly. "I was afraid they were going to think that Phonse was telling a lie."

It was delightful to see the anxious look gone from



"'POOR FOLKS CAN'T NEVER GET THEIR RIGHTS.'"

Uncle David's face; and Phonse, too, looked tired but happy.

Suddenly the top-buggy in which Lawyer Ketchum was driving Dilly Gage home dashed by them. The horse was going fast, but Dilly thrust a tempestuous face out, and called:

"You'll think of that lie you told again, Phonse Brewster, see if you don't! You may laugh at me now, but I'll pay you up. You just wait!"

And Dilly was gone, with Cally Bumpus's feather blowing out of the carriage like a triumphal pennant.

"She makes me think of the song that Philander sings about the 'Gypsy's Curse,'" said Cherry, too happy to feel very sorry for poor Dilly.

But dejection and sullenness had fallen upon Phonse like a cloud.

"You don't mind what *she* says, Phonse?" cried Cherry.

CHAPTER V.

Loveday had prepared fried chicken and pop-overs for supper. She confided to Philander, when he came in to fill the wood-box, her opinion that "if things had gone right 'twas a time for feastin', and if they'd gone wrong good victuals was real kind of heart'nin' and consolin'. And there ain't anything that our children set by like fried chicken and pop-overs."

"Folks that goes to law puts me in mind of them cats in the story that got a monkey to divide their cheese for 'em; he jest ate up their cheese, and there they was," said Philander. He was almost preternaturally tall and gaunt, and he had so large an Adam's-apple that the children never ceased to wonder that it

did not choke him. But the great charms of Philander's appearance were his ear-rings—barbaric hoops of gold—and the tattooings upon his arm; the latter he never displayed except in very depressingly stormy weather, or as a particular reward of merit. There were anchors and chains, hearts and wheels and compasses, a rising sun and a new moon, and P. J. Q. A. F., for Philander John Quincy Adams Fling, in as beautiful letters as the school-mistress could make in a copy-book. Philander reported that he had in his youth been mate of the *Sarah Baker*, and his adventures, as related by himself, were quite without limit as to number, and also, I regret to say, as to probability. But if Philander did not permit himself to be hampered by dull fact in his narrations, he sometimes explained that what he was telling "would be true in a book, but not strickly true out'n a book;" so it happened that when the children demanded to be told how Philander had made acquaintance, on a coral reef, of "the Sky-blue Mermaid with the Pinky Hair," they always added, "in a book, you know, Philander, in a book." Not that there was, in truth, any very great difference, except that "out'n a book" there was a description of the reef that sounded too much like the geography, and the mermaid was quite fishy, and the songs she had sung to Philander were Sunday-school instead of rollicking sailor songs.

Among the earliest impressions of all the children was the idea that Philander was a very distinguished personage, and maturer knowledge had but slowly weakened that impression. They were all, even Rhoda, very proud as well as fond of him, although Rhoda had on several occasions felt it to be her duty to suggest that there should be more difference between "in a book and out'n a book."

"I expect it's about so," said Loveday, with a sigh, referring to Philander's opinion of lawsuits. "If I thought law was what it ought to be I shouldn't feel a mite uneasy, for there ain't anybody there but what knows that playin' tricks comes as nat'ral to Preserved Gage as lickin' cream does to a cat."

"There was the time when we ketched him with a rollin'-pin in the bottom of the bag where he measured the rags," said Tildy, the "hired girl."

"And mixin' the white and colored rags all together before you could stop him, instead of payin' twice as much for the white, as he ought to, and always sayin' that rags has fell and tin-ware has riz. I wouldn't never have traded with him if there'd been another tin-peddler."

"But, for all of his shortcomin's, he may have got hurt," said Philander, leaning against the door, with his empty wood-basket at his side. "Railroad trains seem to be consid'able like the rain, that falls on the just and the unjust. If them cars runnin' into him has made him stone-blind and helpless he'd ought to get damages, for all I see, jest as much as if he was the minister. That's the way that I look at it. I expect tin-peddlin' is kind of wearin' on the morals, anyhow. I'm sorry to see that girl of his follerin' it."

"I like to see folks stand up for their own side, and not be wastin' sympathy on them Gages," said Tildy, tossing her head so that her many ringlets danced.

"Folks that looks deep into things, like me, why, they can't help seein' that justice is justice," said Philander, apologetically, as he disappeared into the dim regions of the wood-shed.

"I believe he really thinks them Gages had ought to have the money," said Tildy, whose own code of morals was the quite simple and not altogether uncom-

mon one of standing up for her own side, right or wrong.

"I'm afraid there's a good many that thinks so," said Loveday. "Run out to the end of the lane again, Tildy, and see if you can't see 'em comin'. Seems as if 'twas what I couldn't bear to have such pop-overs as them get cold."

Tildy, who had looked out as many times as Bluebeard's sister-in-law, returned, breathless, to say that Dilly Gage had just driven by with Lawyer Ketchum from Winfield.

"I see Cally Bumpus's pink feather a-blowin' out before ever they got to the top of the hill, so I knew 'twas Dilly Gage comin' back. They was goin' like everything, but she stuck her head out and made up a face at me. She looked all worked up and ready to cry, too."

"Then I guess it's all right," said Loveday, cheerfully. "And our folks will be along soon. I'm glad I cooked such a lot of chicken, if you did laugh; folks will eat a sight more when they're happy than they will when they're took down."

"I guess them Gages are took down for once in their lives, and if ever anybody needed it, it's that girl," said Tildy.

So they talked joyfully of "our folks's" probable triumph, and sent no pity after poor Dilly, going home with her ruined hopes and sense of injury.

Tildy's next looking out was rewarded by the sight of the carriage at the foot of the hill; and as soon as it came near enough, smiles and nods confirmed the story that poor Dilly's sad and angry face had told. In Byerly, with its primitive and "countrified" ways, there were no servants, only "help," and long service made them the confidants of all the family joys and

sorrows. Loveday would hear from the children every little incident of the day, and Tildy, although it might be at second-hand, would hear all about it, too.

As she didn't mean that it should be at second-hand, Tildy hurried in to be ready to serve the supper. But, strange to say, every one except Squire Brewster seemed a little out of sorts. They had won, of course, although "that ridiculous jury," as Phonse called it, had awarded one dollar as damages to Preserved Gage.

"I suppose he really ought to be paid for his brooms," said Cherry, meditatively.

"Land sake! a dozen of his brooms ain't worth a dollar," said Loveday.

Phonse would not eat, although Loveday, with whom he was quite a pet, had picked out the largest strawberries for him, and although his normal appetite for pop-overs was remarkably keen.

"If you're going to talk it over any more, I believe I shall *die!*" he said, pushing his chair away from the table. "A fellow can't stand everything."

This was in spite of the fact that he knew that no one, not even Rhoda, would touch upon those points upon which he was likely to be sensitive, and that Uncle David was so reticent that they might almost rely upon his never mentioning to them the arithmetic lessons, about which, by this time, half the school-boys and girls of Byerly were talking.

So it was sitting upon Cherry's bed that night that Loveday heard all about it. Loveday had taken Cherry to her honest heart on the day when she was brought, a forlorn, motherless baby, to Flying Hill Farm, and it was always Loveday, if any one, to whom Cherry told her troubles.

Loveday wiped away the contrite and relieved tears

that Cherry shed over the matter of Phonse's examples.

"I can't say you was right to do 'em, and I ain't a-goin' to say you was so dretful wrong, bein' you was so kind of weighted by what your grandmother said. She wouldn't never have said it if she'd been herself. She'd have known such a mite of a thing as you wa'n't fit to look out for Phonse, and him so contr'y. Land sake! I've thought he was only kind of peevish when I couldn't get him to tell me what time it was when I was in the dairy with my hands in the butter. I don't wonder that folks was loath to believe it, and yet if you know him it ain't so strange. Do I think it was queer that a man should have swore so firm that he heard Phonse tell old Gage what time it was? Land, no, dear! they can hire folks to swear to anything. There's a sight more wickedness than you've any idea of. Well, I'm glad it got overthrowed this time. Now you go to sleep, dearie, after your tirin' day, and be thankful there's a good God watchin' over all. What if old Gage was hurt? Now, don't you go to worryin' yourself that way, you foolish child; don't you suppose the doctors know? And don't his tellin' a lie about Phonse's tellin' him the time show that he is lyin' about everything? He never thought of bein' blind till two or three days afterwards. He and his daughter together made up the story that she told. Now you go to sleep."

"Wait a minute, Loveday. I didn't tell you about Dilly Gage when we were coming home."

And then followed a graphic account of Dilly's thrilling menace.

"Now, you ain't foolish enough to let that worry you! What could she do to any of you?" said Loveday.

"No, no, I'm not afraid of Dilly," said Cherry.

And then Loveday went. And Cherry had not told her that she only minded what Dilly had said because of its effect upon Phonse; that his face had changed strikingly, and that he had been dejected and miserable ever since. There were some things that Cherry did not tell, even to Loveday. And, after all, Phonse's moods were so variable that no one ever pretended to account for them; apparently, no one but her had observed any change in him, and she was foolish to think about it at all.

So Cherry, as she was bidden, thought comfortingly of the good God watching over all, and was drifting gently away to a peaceful land of forgetfulness, when suddenly the opening of the door aroused her, and there stood Rhoda, looking like a ghost in the moonlight in her long night-gown.

"Cherry, I forgot to ask you if you saw how very queerly Phonse looked when Dilly Gage called out to him that he would think again of the lie he told. He did look very queerly. He turned as pale as could be. I can't go to sleep for thinking of it. And what that drummer man testified he heard him say did sound so like Phonse! Putting two and two together, I don't know what to make of it."

"I should think it was enough to be always putting two and two together in the daytime, without doing it at this time of night," said Cherry, crossly. "I suppose it might make any one look queerly to be talked to in that way, even by Dilly Gage. I think it's horrid to be always suspecting people. Phonse can't tell time, so he *couldn't* have said that." Cherry was perhaps crosser than she would have been if Rhoda had not echoed the thoughts which she had found it difficult to banish from her own mind.

"That man seemed so honest," persisted Rhoda. "Some one might have told Phonse so he knew, or he might have answered at random because he didn't want Preserved Gage to suspect that he couldn't tell time. I heard Squire Follett say, coming out of the court-room, that it was only Preserved Gage's reputation that lost him the case. He seemed to think the railroad ought to pay him damages. Of course it would be ridiculous for them to have so much money, but it would be dreadful for us to wrong them!"

"You'd better go and wake up the jury, Rhoda. *I'm* going to sleep." And Cherry resolutely turned her face to the wall.

"Of course, you think only of Phonse," continued Rhoda, "but if one has a real sense of justice—"

But it was unsatisfactory to talk to one who breathed so heavily and regularly as Cherry, and Rhoda went away to her own room feeling aggrieved, and wishing she had a sister, since Cherry was so unsympathetic.

She did not refer to the matter the next morning. She said to herself that Cherry was sure to be cross and unreasonable about anything that implied a doubt of Phonse. She would have liked to tell Ben all about it, but Ben had no taste for disputations nor the thinking out of knotty questions.

"If things bother you, and you can't make up your mind, just take a good run in the fresh air," Ben would say. "That'll blow the nonsense all out of you, and you'll be apt to see just how things are. If you can't, then, why, just give it up; it's of no use to fret." When the world went *too* wrong with Ben he went fishing.

Decidedly, Ben would be even more unsatisfactory as a confidant than Cherry, thought Rhoda. Moreover, he had an extremely unpleasant habit of quoting to

her, "John Robinson he thinks the world will go right if he hollers out gee."

It was useless to try to talk to her father about it. For him the matter was settled and done with, and he was going about his business with a brisker and more hopeful air than for a long time previously. Rhoda had also overheard Squire Follett say, "If the old fellow had got anything like the amount of damages he claimed, it would have been a serious matter for Brewster in the fix he's already in."

Rhoda knew very little about business; she did not understand as well as Cherry what the loss of money might mean, and she had an unwavering confidence in her father's ability to extricate himself from any trouble which he might be in, but it was plain to her that he would have no patience with her doubts about the matter. Her father was an honest man; were even honest people readier to believe things right which were to their advantage? And Cherry was quite satisfied because Phonse had come off so victorious. People were praising him for his behavior on the witness-stand. And how easily she and Phonse had taken the exposure of their cheating about the arithmetic lessons, which would have almost killed her (Rhoda)! Phonse had not seemed to mind going to school again, and he had borne quite patiently the mortification of being placed in the lowest arithmetic class, and was really trying to learn the multiplication-table! Every one seemed to regard Cherry and him as heroes instead of culprits. Rhoda had never been able to think it proper that the prodigal son should have had the fatted calf.

"I might go and see the Gages. I might find out whether he really is paralyzed and blind, but that girl is so very rude. I am not sure that she would let me

in. And if she did, of course they would pretend as hard as they could. And I shouldn't have found out that puzzling thing about Phonse. Chissy Fenwick might remember. I suppose they would have called him as a witness if he had not gone away. He has gone to Africa in his father's ship, away off to Cape Natal. I think I shall go and ask his aunt whether she thinks a letter would ever reach him, and where to direct it." Ben said that "when a bee got to buzzing in Rhoda's bonnet it never stopped."

Meanwhile the multiplication-table was going very hard. It was only after he had been at work upon it for two whole weeks that Phonse "freed his mind" about it to Cherry, down behind a hay-stack in the meadow.

"When you get against a great high blank wall you know you can't get any farther, don't you, Cherry? Well, when my brains get against a lot of figures it's just like that; they're simply done for," Phonse explained, with a kind of patient dejection, which was unlike himself, and which touched Cherry's heart. "And now the fellows have taken to snickering. Little Peckett kept 'em from it as long as she could, but they do it now, and the big girls, too, and when it comes my turn they all stop whatever they're doing and gape at me. It's so still you could hear a mouse squeal. Little Peckett couldn't get 'em so still if she tried a month. It doesn't help a fellow's wits any."

"Phonse, I think if I were you I should ask Uncle David to let me leave off studying arithmetic after vacation. He must understand now how hard it is for you."

"I did ask him," said Phonse, "but it was of no use. He said a fellow couldn't get through the world without knowing more mathematics than I did; he'd be



"PHONSE FREED HIS MIND ABOUT IT TO CHERRY."

constantly hindered and mortified. But as for being mortified, I'm getting used to that. I've found there are worse things in the world than that." Phonse sighed heavily. "He wasn't very bad about it, Uncle David wasn't; he seemed to realize more'n you'd think what a fellow had to go through with; but he said 'twas good for a fellow to go through with hard things. He needed it to make a man of him. He said perhaps I needed particularly just such an obstacle to fight against. He hinted at me that I was girly. He's always doing that, you know. Ben does, too, and that little clown of a Simmy Backup, with his pig. It makes a fellow grind his teeth sometimes. Fancy that little beggar of a Simmy Backup doing problems like the Lightning Calculator at the show, and having geometry at his finger-ends, when he talks such an orfle lot of bad grammar, and hasn't any eyes! Why, he doesn't see anything but firewood in a tree, and he thinks the sky was made to fly his kite in. And a fellow has got to be looked down on and thought a fool by him! Cherry, I think I shall run away."

"You can't run away from arithmetic," said Cherry, sagely. "It's all over the world. Don't you remember that the Purple Peri that Philander met floating on an iceberg in the Indian Ocean was doing sums, though I believe she said she was only doing them to get warmed up?"

But this attempt to cheer Phonse was rewarded only by a faint and sickly smile, although Phonse took the greatest delight of any of them in Philander's narratives.

"I think you take it too hard, I really do, Phonse," she said, trying a different method. "I've read of so many bright people who—who didn't like arithmetic. Marjorie Fleming said, don't you remember, that

'seven times eight was what nature itself couldn't endure?'"

"She was a girl," said Phonse. "It doesn't matter whether a girl knows the multiplication-table or not. She doesn't have her own way to make. That's what Uncle David said I would have, my own way to make; he said he thought it was not probable that he could do anything more for me than to give me an education."

"I shall have my way to make just as much as you, if I am a girl," said Cherry.

Phonse looked at her as if a new idea had struck him.

"I believe you could," he said, with an air of conviction. "You're so clever, and you don't mind things as I do. You make a silly fuss, of course, sometimes, but you might get over that."

"And you can be an artist, Phonse! Do you know, I think Uncle David is going to think differently about that, from some things he said. I think that day in court was a fortunate one, after all."

"Fortunate! *Fortunate!*" cried Phonse. "It was the very horridest day I ever spent. I didn't know anything in the world could be so bad."

"It was hard at the time, of course, harder for you than for any one else."

"I should think it was!" said Phonse.

"But then it turned out so well," said Cherry.

"It's over, at any rate, that's one comfort," said Phonse. "A fellow would rather die than go through with it again. As for turning out well, I suppose those things always turn out well for somebody. Uncle David is all right."

"I think of them too — those Gages, Phonse," said Cherry, eagerly. "I didn't know that they worried you."

"Who said they did worry me?" said Phonse, with one of his fiercest scowls.

"You don't think it's possible, do you, Phonse, that they were wronged?" persisted Cherry.

"Oh, I suppose the old rascal is shamming, fast enough," said Phonse. "It would be just like him, and the jury thought the doctors who said so told the truth. It was the doctors who settled the business, you know."

"Ye-e-s, I suppose so," said Cherry, slowly. "But of course your bringing him out in that falsehood he told about the time made a difference."

"It didn't make a bit of difference. It's just like you to think that," said Phonse, ill-naturedly. "Of course they knew he might be blind afterwards, if he wasn't then. And they knew that some one else might have told him, or they would have known it if they hadn't been a lot of simpletons. I never saw such a lot of simpletons."

"Some one else, Phonse? How could—"

"Didn't you hear what that drummer said? Well, he wasn't swearing falsely; any one with a grain of sense could tell that he wasn't. He only made a mistake."

"A *mistake*, Phonse?" said Cherry, faintly.

"Yes, a mistake; the same one that old Gage made; He thought he was telling the truth. *I* didn't say what they said I did: 'It's nineteen minutes past three, but that old clock is never right,' but some one else did."

"Phonse, what do you mean?" cried Cherry. "Who said it?"

"Chissy Fenwick. There were some alder-bushes between him and the drummer; I suppose that's why he didn't see him. I should think old Gage might have."

"And you didn't tell of it?" cried Cherry, springing up from her seat at the foot of the hay-stack. "Oh, Phonse, what shall we do? what shall we do?"

CHAPTER VI.

"I DIDN'T tell?" echoed Phonse, impatiently. "Of course I didn't tell. Why should I tell? They didn't ask me what Chissy Fenwick said. If they had thought it was very important, anyway, all that stuff about the clock, they would have thought of him. Of course the doctors' evidence settled it. I didn't remember it, anyway, until that fellow said it over. Then it came across me like a flash that Chissy had said just those words when I said it was too late to go fishing. I did think at first that I would tell just how it was, but that lawyer fellow had been bluffing and browbeating me so I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction. And it might have made some of them believe that old Preserved was blind, and lost the case for Uncle David."

"But oh, Phonse, he wouldn't have wanted you to keep anything back. And it looks as if he might be blind; he didn't see Chissy Fenwick."

"I'm not sure but there were some bushes between them. Of course I didn't notice. A fellow doesn't expect that he's going to be put upon the witness-stand and tormented almost to death because a stupid old tin-peddler asks him what time it is. He said I went up to his wagon; that was false, anyway. It was a misty kind of day; it had been raining—nobody said anything about that, either; that showed they didn't really think all that stuff about whether Preserved could see

the clock or not was of much consequence. It never seemed to me that it amounted to anything, but just to give people a chance to torment me."

"Perhaps he couldn't see the clock, Phonse. He knew what time it was because he heard Chissy Fenwick tell you. He knew you; he could see you."

"He asked me if I wasn't 'one of Brewster's boys,' and he peered at me; but then he always had a kind of peering way with his eyes. I suppose he had made up his mind by that time to pretend to be blind."

"Phonse, I believe he *is* blind. I believe he and Dilly have told the truth. And you must go this very minute to Uncle David and tell him about Chissy Fenwick. He will know what to do. Perhaps there'll be another trial."

In her excitement Cherry had seized Phonse by the arm, with the intention of leading him immediately to Uncle David. Phonse shook her off angrily. "I shouldn't have told you that if I hadn't thought you had a little bit of sense, Cherry Eastman. Uncle David wouldn't thank me, I can tell you. Perhaps you think he'd go to Lawyer Ketchum and say, 'I've found some new evidence against my side; you'd better have another trial.' '

"Uncle David is honest," said Cherry, stoutly.

"Of course he is honest, but he isn't a fool. And if they were to go all through with that performance again it would kill me. That's all it would do. It was the doctors' evidence that convinced the jury; every one says so."

"I suppose it was," said Cherry; "but oh, Phonse, it must have been so aggravating to Preserved Gage and to Dilly! They think you told a lie. Oh, I wish you had told about Chissy Fenwick."

"It's just like a girl to be wishing, when wishing

does no good. Don't you suppose I'm bothered enough about it without your making me feel worse?"

"I know you are, I know you are, Phonse," cried Cherry, with sudden contrition, remembering how every one had been struck by Phonse's altered looks. "But it would be so much better—oh, don't you think it would be better to tell Uncle David, and let him decide about it?"

"And get him into a muddle! that would be a pretty return for what he has done for me, wouldn't it? I did help him a little, and now I'm not going to undo it all."

"But, Phonse, you don't seem to think how dreadful it is if the Gages have been wronged. If he is blind and helpless I don't know what Dilly will do. They've always seemed to be awfully poor."

"I don't think, do I?" cried Phonse, in the shrill, high-pitched voice which excitement always gave him. "I don't think of much else. That girl's face comes before me when I try to go to sleep. Every time I try to eat I wonder if they're not hungry."

"I know you are tender-hearted, Phonse; I ought to have remembered," said Cherry. "But it isn't of any use to think of people if we don't *do* anything."

"I can't go through with all that again, I tell you, Cherry. I can't have it stirred up and talked about. And if you go and tell Uncle David you'll only annoy him. I ought not to have told you, but a fellow keeps thinking and thinking of a thing, sometimes, until he *must* tell somebody. And he knows he'll make it seem bigger than it is if he doesn't tell somebody. I expected you'd say it didn't amount to anything, anyway; but a girl never has any sense. Mind, you've no *right* to tell. It's my affair, and I told you in confidence," added Phonse, fiercely.

Cherry was silent for a few minutes. She braided

wisps of hay together, and then tore them nervously to pieces.

"We must find out about Preserved Gage, Phonse; you and I. If he is helpless and blind we won't let *anything* hinder us from doing what is right, will we?"

"You can't find out," said Phonse. "I'd like to. I'd give anything to. But that girl won't let us. She looked ready to tear me into pieces."

"I think I shall go to see her," said Cherry, slowly. "I'm not afraid that she will tear me into pieces. Poor Dilly! I remember how proud she used to be when no one could spell her down in a match at school. I think those were the only times I ever saw her look happy. Do you know, Phonse, I think I ought to have gone to see her before. I don't see why I haven't; I knew she was poor and friendless. I don't think there is a girl of her age down in Roaring Brook settlement. And I go to see lots of girls whom I don't care particularly about, and who don't care about me, because they have so many other friends."

(It seemed that the text which Dilly had heard in Sunday-school, "When thou makest a feast," was beginning to "mean something" to Cherry.)

"I don't think it's of any use to try to make friends of those people," said Phonse. "A fellow doesn't like to think they're cold or hungry, or anything like that; he can't keep it out of his mind. But it's of no use trying to pretend they're like other people, because they're not. And that girl wouldn't let you be friends with her. Her father is one of those Socialist fellows, or thinks he is. I don't suppose he knows what he's talking about. I've heard him ranting away, in the store. He thinks the poor people ought to take away the rich people's land, and burn up their houses. He seems to think all rich people are his natural enemies."

"We're not rich people," said Cherry, practically.

"I don't think you have to be very rich to make Preserved Gage hate you," said Phonse. "Uncle David used to be called a rich man for Byerly, and I don't think those fellows forgive you, even if you get over it."

"I think that Dilly has more sense than her father," said Cherry, meditatively.

"She behaves as if she had a lot of sense," said Phonse, with extreme sarcasm.

"It isn't any wonder that she feels dreadfully provoked," said Cherry. "I am sure that if her father is making believe, he is deceiving her too."

"I've been thinking about it, and I don't believe he could. Of course she would pretend; she wouldn't care how they got the money. She's an orfle sharp girl; it would be easy enough for her to take you in," said Phonse, with an air of superiority.

"I suppose I'm not very clever," said Cherry, humbly. "And it hurts me so not to believe in people."

"You'll have to get over that," said Phonse, with a man-of-the-world air. "It isn't at all the sort of world that you think it is, if you're a girl, or small. You just have to believe that every one is trying to cheat you, and you must struggle and push to keep your own head above water, and not mind what happens to other people."

"Oh, Phonse Brewster! how can you say such horrid things? You don't think them, you know you don't!" cried Cherry.

"Jeff Atwell, down at the store, says so, anyway," said Phonse, looking only a trifle abashed. "And every one calls him smart. His father says he is going to make a lawyer of him. Anyway, I'm not going to trouble myself about those Gages."

It was very evident that Phonse was using Jeff Atwell's philosophy to bolster up his conscience in the matter of the Gages. It was also evident that it was not successful. "You won't trouble yourself about them either if you're not a silly," he added, as Cherry was walking silently away, with a downcast air. "And, I say, Cherry, if you should tell what I told you—I don't suppose you're mean and wicked enough to do it—but if you should, I should run away to sea. You know I'm not pretending; I would certainly do it; sometimes I think it is the best thing I could do, anyway." Phonse's voice shook. "And I should have to go with the first captain who would take me; it might be on board one of those whalers, where they abuse fellows orfly, or it might be a ship that was going where they have fevers, or plagues and things. *I* shouldn't mind; but in winter nights, when the wind howled—well, I shouldn't wonder if you hated to hear it worse than you do now!"

Cherry shrank perceptibly from the mention of these awful possibilities, and Phonse congratulated himself upon the effect he had produced. He fully intended to carry out his threats, but was aware that, on the whole, he should prefer to be spared the necessity for such desperate action.

Cherry straightened herself, and turned upon him indignantly, after a moment's reflection. "It's very mean of you, Phonse, to try to frighten me in that way, because you know I can't help being soft and minding what happens to you. It sounds foolish, too, as if I were a little girl. I sha'n't mind it in the least. I shall do what I think is right."

Phonse's sensitive face flushed, and his brow darkened as he looked after her. That Cherry should revolt like this was something new. He could usually

depend upon Cherry to do as he asked her, and he had never realized how important this allegiance of hers was to his happiness. Now it appeared she was going to be like Rhoda, and think it her "duty" to tell. If she did he must run away; a fellow couldn't stand everything, he said aloud. Running away was an expedient which always suggested itself to Phonse's mind when difficulties loomed darkly. He had a strong instinct to avoid everything that was in any way unpleasant (Ben privately thought him a great coward—an opinion strongly concurred in by Simmy Backup), and there was also an adventurous side to his nature, which Philander's romances had tended to develop. But Phonse had begun to realize that his views of what was likely to happen to a boy who ran away to sea were visionary. It was quite a long time ago that he had relinquished, with a keen sense of loss, the expectation of meeting a mermaid, gracefully fanning herself with her tail, upon a coral reef or in a silver grotto, or a sea-lion with a fancy for relating his adventures; but it was only of late that the probable realities of a sailor boy's life had been forcing themselves upon his imagination, and he had concluded that there was a dreadful possibility that a boy, no better adapted to "roughing it" than he was, might wish himself at home. Nevertheless, if it came to a question of being placed again upon that witness-stand he thought he should not hesitate. "I don't believe I should mind sea-sickness or home-sickness, or even the rope's end as much as I mind the sight of that girl's face! I never noticed before how thin and hungry she looked. I'm afraid I can't run away from thinking of that, any more than I can from arithmetic, as Cherry says. Cherry ought to find out that he's making believe. That would set everything right. But you can't depend

upon a girl, anyway. I'd give anything to see that old fellow for myself. I believe I should know whether he was a fraud or not. Perhaps I'm foolish to think I could tell, when the doctors can't—at least they don't agree about it; but I should like to see him. He must be so orfly mad with me that if he could see me he couldn't help showing it. I'm afraid of that girl, I don't mind owning it, but I'm not afraid of old Preserved himself. Let me think; they say she goes off tin-peddling every day. I'll just go down there to the Roaring Brook settlement and look about a little."

But with Phonse to make a resolve was not always to carry it out. He sat irresolute in the shadow of the hay-stack and looked towards the Roaring Brook road, and wondered whether Cherry would really go to their uncle, and what he would say, and whether Dilly Gage made any money at tin-peddling, and how a fellow would feel high up in a ship's rigging in a storm, deciding that it was doubtful whether he would be in a mood to observe artistic effects; and then suddenly he became aware that there was a sunset red in the sky, and that the old elm in the corner of the field, which had been struck by lightning, was vividly outlined against it. Upon one of its blasted branches a wild grape-vine had compensatingly twined itself, and it looked like a gay banner waved from a ruined tower.

In a moment Phonse had drawn his sketch-book from his pocket, and was oblivious of everything in the world but picturesque effects.

"If I could only paint! if I only had some colors!" he murmured aloud, with perhaps a keener sense of being at odds with fate than he had had in all his other troubles.

He drew slowly, almost timidly, with delicate, accurate strokes. Dilly Gage might almost have made a

face at him without his knowing it. In the mean time Cherry, going on her way, with her head held high and quite a tumult of indignation in her bosom, met Rhoda coming along the field path, trim and dainty and unruffled, as Rhoda always was, but with a certain air of being, as Phonse would have called it, up to something.

"I've been down to Mrs. Chisholm's," she said. "She has heard from Chissy Fenwick. He is in South Africa, away at the bottom of the map, where you make the little bit of a scallop when you draw it. Doesn't it seem strange? That is his address. I asked Mrs. Chisholm to tell me, so I could write it down."

Cherry understood in a moment what Rhoda meant to do, and the consciousness of the secret which she was keeping made her flush guiltily. If Rhoda were not so hard upon Phonse—if she were not, as Phonse declared, so mathematically good, making no more allowance for a fellow's weaknesses than the multiplication-table did—she almost thought she should have told her. Surely they were quite agreed; they were both troubled lest wrong had been done to the Gages. Cherry was suddenly seized with a new feeling that it was strange and sad that Rhoda and she should always be so far apart in sympathy; poor, perplexed Cherry, who did not yet realize that foolish human creatures everywhere walk the same paths, hoping for the same goal, with jostling, and bitterness, and utterly divided hearts.

Rhoda felt the lack of sympathy even more than she, and said it was all Cherry's fault; it was chiefly because she was so foolish about Phonse.

"I am going to write to Chissy Fenwick," said Rhoda. "I don't suppose he will remember, he has had such exciting times since, but there's just a little bit of a chance that he may."

"Remember what?" said Cherry; and although she had just been having such softened thoughts of Rhoda, she spoke crossly, so crossly that it surprised herself, as I am afraid all our tongues have a trick of surprising us once in a while, as if the awful, mysterious little telegraph wires that connect them with our hearts got mixed up and ticked off the wrong message.

"About what Phonse said that day," said Rhoda, in her calm, even voice. "It is so very puzzling; and Phonse certainly behaves as if—well, very queerly. I can't feel satisfied that the right was on our side; and it is always so satisfactory to get at the bottom facts." Rhoda emphasized these words with an air of great wisdom. "That is what papa always says is the great thing—to get at the bottom facts. But when I talked to him about this he didn't seem at all interested. He acted as if he were annoyed. He called me silly, which I am sure no one ever called me before—no one of the least consequence, that is," amended Rhoda, doubtless recalling candid personalities on the part of the boys. "He said that of course he wouldn't wish to profit by any injustice. I knew that before; that was why I expected him to be more interested; but he was perfectly convinced that Phonse told the exact truth about what he said to Preserved Gage that day."

"I *know* he did," cried Cherry, "and I think it is perfectly horrid of you to think he would tell a lie—like that," she added, faintly.

"I can't make it out," said Rhoda, shaking her head sagely. "And when I can't make things out I'm sure there's something wrong about them." And, with a sigh, Rhoda went on, evidently finding Cherry as unsatisfactory as ever. "I shall write to Chissy Fenwick," she turned back to say; and Cherry was angry, because she thought her tone made it seem as

if she had added, "although I know you don't want me to."

Cherry had almost resolved to tell Uncle David what Phonse had told her, or at least she thought she had; perhaps the long habit of shielding Phonse at almost any cost would have asserted its power at the last moment in any case. The meeting with Rhoda caused an entire revulsion of feeling. To tell of Phonse while Rhoda was "picking upon him" like that, she said to herself, would be like a mean-spirited going over to the enemy.

"But I can't bear to let things go as they are. I shall go down to the Roaring Brook settlement! I may find out whether Preserved Gage is blind and paralyzed, or at least whether they are so very poor."

It required courage to go down there; Cherry felt a great shrinking from Dilly and her father, but, nevertheless, she turned back across the field, and Phonse, if he had not been so intent upon drawing the "lightning tree," as they always called it, might have seen her climb over the stone wall, the way "across lots" to Roaring Brook.

CHAPTER VII.

Cherry hurried along, never stopping even to pick the few late strawberries that grew so large, on their tall stems, in the newly cleared land on the edge of the woods; nor the wakerobins, that looked shyly out at her from behind the blackened stumps of the burnt land, and never letting herself be daunted by the awful stillness and twilight darkness of the deep woods, although her heart always beat faster there; nor by the sudden whirring of wings and the weird



"PHONSE, IF HE HAD NOT BEEN SO INTENT UPON DRAWING THE 'LIGHTNING TREE,' MIGHT HAVE SEEN CHERRY CLIMB OVER THE STONE WALL."

whisperings which sounded so like human voices, but which, of course, one knew well enough were only the pine-trees, which seem to have a story that never gets told. Now and then a great birch-tree made her heart jump, it looked so ghostly in its white dress in the semi-darkness; and here, by the old log lumbering-camp, was the place where three little paths branched off, all seeming to lead in the same direction, but unless one chose rightly one would get lost in the depths of the woods or led into the swamp before one knew it. Cherry used to know the right path, she said to herself, but it was a long time since she had been to the Roaring Brook settlement, and she stood still, not quite certain whether it was the one where there was a fallen tree, or the one that was a little muddy at the beginning, or the one which looked just like the path on which she had come so far.

"I ought to have gone 'round by the road, only there wasn't time; but I might have waited until to-morrow, when there would have been," she said to herself. "But I think I remember that the fallen tree path isn't the right one, and the muddy one looks as if it went into the swamp. I'll follow this one that looks right, and if it's wrong I shall know it by the looks of things before long."

She was out of the deep woods now. The path ran through a growth of low bushes and slender saplings, and the open sky, flaming with sunset splendor, was above her head, and Cherry's spirits rose.

"I'm glad I came," she said to herself. "I like to have things over with, if Loveday does say I'm too impulsive."

It seemed as if the path ran so straight to Roaring Brook that it must be right, but the increasing underbrush warned Cherry that she had chosen wrongly.

"I've come too far to go back," she said to herself. "I ought to have come out at the carriage-road by this time. I think I can go across through the bushes and find it; they're not tall, so I can't get lost. I can see Tumble Down Hill all the way, and hark! I think I hear the brook roaring."

Cherry pushed her way through the bushes, undaunted by brambles or briers, following the direction of the sound. If she could once reach the brook she could follow it until she came to the Gages' house.

The sound of the brook came nearer and nearer; one little struggle more through the thick underbrush and she might reach it. Suddenly a great crashing in the bushes behind her made her jump. It seemed as if some huge animal were close upon her. She remembered, with a shiver, the stories she had heard Loveday tell of wild-cats on Tumble Down Hill, when she was a girl. She laughed at herself the next moment. There had been no wild-cats seen in that region for twenty years at least. Phonse said the wild creatures that used to live there had not had a fair chance, and this was probably a stray cow from the settlement, though she would not have supposed that any of the people who lived there were thrifty enough to keep a cow. But the animal, whatever it was, had no intention of pursuing her, for she could hear it plunging off in the direction of the deep woods.

Another moment and she could see the brook.

"Land sakes alive! you scairt me 'most to pieces," cried a voice, and from the bank arose a tall girl with a gypsyish face and bare, brier-torn feet—Cally Bumpus, the proprietor of the famous pink-feathered bonnet. Cherry knew her because Loveday bought berries of her, and sometimes strings of trout, which were plenty in Roaring Brook, after it had flowed around to



"'LAND SAKES ALIVE! YOU SCAIRT ME 'MOST TO PIECES.'"

the other side of Tumble Down Hill, in the midst of almost impenetrable underbrush. "It's enough to give anybody their never-get-over to come upon 'em like that, with all the stories there is round here. I thought you was the ghost!"

"The ghost?" echoed Cherry, in a puzzled tone.

"Hain't you heard of it?" exclaimed Cally Bumpus. "Well, I expect you stuck-up folks on Flyin' Hill don't care nothin' what happens down here to the settlement. Such kind of folks makes light of ghosts too. Mebbe, now, you don't believe in 'em?"

Cherry declined to commit herself, having really no opinion whatever on the subject of ghosts. She could not remember that one had ever figured in Philander's narratives. She remembered having been convinced, in her early childhood, by Aunt Ruth, that there were no such things as the "booger men" and witches with which ignorant servant-girls tried to frighten her; but so far as she could remember, she had never been really frightened. And she now failed to feel the slightest thrill of terror at the thought of Cally Bumpus's ghost. But she thought it might not be quite polite to say so, as Cally herself was so much impressed, and seemed to resent any doubt cast upon its genuineness.

"You'd believe in 'em if you see one, now, wouldn't you?" said Cally, in a thrilling tone.

"Have you seen one?" asked Cherry.

"No, I hain't, nor I don't want to," returned Cally, with emphasis. "But my brother 'Lando has, and old Stevie Mann, and it was eight feet high, all in white, with glitterin' eyes, and it just vanished right away without a mite of a sound; anyhow, 'Lando said that was the way it went, but old Stevie Mann he went right up to the place where it was—he ain't afraid of nothin', old Stevie ain't, because he ain't so smart as some—and

he says he heard kind of a rustlin' in the bushes, but it wa'n't nothin' like what a human cretur would make. 'Twas bright moonlight when 'Lando and Stevie Mann see it, but Lowizy Rolandson she see it on the edge of the evenin', and folks kind of think that Dilly Gage see it, but she was so scairt she was 'most dead, and she don't like to have folks say nothin' about it. She kind of got belated with her tin-peddlin', and was comin' home along the cross-road between daylight and dark, and she see something, for my brother Lewellyn he heard her fetch a screech, and Lewellyn he says he thinks he see something white vanishin' in the bushes. Lewellyn is terrible cautious about what he says, and it's as much for him to say he *thinks* he see it as it would be for some folks to declare up and down. 'Twas just there by that piece of woods that's back of Dilly's house. When she got to the house old Jane was so scairt she was tremblin', and Dilly she was 'most faintin' away. Lewellyn he had to help her off the wagon. She got into the house and shut the door in Lewellyn's face; you can see how scairt she was by that, for 'twa'n't the least mite like Dilly. It takes consid'able to frighten Dilly Gage. And she hollered out to Lewellyn to go right home, and not say a single word to nobody. And what do you think some folks makes out of that?—'tain't nobody, though, but Phœbe Dewsnap and a few mean gossipin' creturs that'll listen to her. She says she believes the ghost ain't nobody but old Preserved Gage, that can walk if he's a mind to, and goes round playin' ghost so'st he can stretch his legs a little and keep folks from findin' it out!"

Cherry uttered a little involuntary exclamation. To her mind it seemed an extremely probable and satisfactory way of accounting for the ghost. Cally turned upon her sharply.

"You'd like to think 'twas so, now, wouldn't you? I don't know what I was thinkin' of to tell you about it anyhow. But 'tain't no such a thing, and don't you go to thinkin' it is, nor sayin' so neither. Likely, ain't it, that he could get up and go walkin' round and Dilly not know it? And you can't make me believe Dilly Gage would ever do nothin' deceitful; it ain't in her. Beats me how folks can see that poor old cretur layin' there a-sufferin' and then go off and get up such stories. Your folks have got something to answer for, I can tell you that. I expect you think you're such big-bugs that there hain't goin' to be no day of judgment for you, but I guess you'll find out. Come to think of it, I don't know as you was so much to blame; you ain't skurcely more'n a young one." Cally surveyed Cherry with critical eighteen-year-old superiority. "You ain't the one that hollered out in court, be you? Be you?" as Cherry nodded an embarrassed assent. "I thought it was the other one, that little nipped-up piece they call Rhoda. Seems more like her; she's sarcier'n what you be. She looks at folks as if they was the dirt under her feet. I expect you're jest the same, only you don't show it quite so much. Well, I shouldn't want to be in your shoes! You're jest a-livin' in the house and havin' the victuals and clothes that belongs to Dilly Gage and her father, for they say your uncle hain't got no more'n enough to pay 'em in the world. He's most run out, and you ain't no dif'runt from poor folks yourselves!"

Cherry had known before that no artificial code of manners prevented the Roaring Brook people from speaking their minds, but that did not prevent her from being both hurt and indignant at Cally Bumpus's attack. It was useless to defend one's self; conversation with Cally was difficult, if not impossible. She

moved away in silence, with her head well up, and as much dignity of manner as was consistent with the difficulty of making one's way through underbrush. Cally called after her:

"Now, don't you go to tellin' about this pool. There ain't nothin' here to ketch, anyhow." (Cally's basket was more than half full of shining, gayly speckled trout.) "What you down here for, anyway? I shouldn't think you'd want to come nigh the Gages."

This was an opening for a question which Cherry had felt that her dignity would scarcely allow her to ask.

"I came to see Dilly Gage. Can I get to the house by taking this path?"

"Yes, foller your nose," said Cally, concisely. "You can't, though, can you, 'thout you go up?" she added as an after-thought.

Of course one did not really mind this vulgar little thrust of Cally's, and it was annoying that it would bring the color to one's face, as none of her other remarks had done.

"Going to see Dilly Gage? Well, you've got cheek, ain't you!" called Cally, who seemed to mean to atone for the unbecoming affability into which her relish for gossip about the ghost had led her by showing a loyal resentment towards Dilly Gage's enemy. "She ain't a-goin' to take any of your sarce, you'd better b'lieve."

Cherry turned upon her with one of her sudden impulses.

"You don't understand," she said. "I want to help Dilly Gage if I can. We wouldn't wrong her or anybody for the world."

"Talk's cheap!" shouted Cally. "Cheap, cheap!" echoed Tumble Down Hill above the brook's noise, and a homeward flying bird alighted on a juniper-tree and

uttered a note which sounded like "cheap, cheap!" too. And Cherry felt as if everything around had joined together to insult her, and she could not arouse herself to defy them because of a dreadful doubt whether she did not deserve it.

She wished that she had not come. Uncle David and Loveday and all of them were certainly right in deploring her rashness. It was much better to stop to think, as Rhoda did. She did not know in the least what she should say to Dilly Gage; it was going to be much more unpleasant to meet her than she had expected. Dilly had the same unpleasing candor of speech that characterized Cally Bumpus, and with her greater provocation what might she not say? Although she was unskilled in parrying their coarse weapons, how little she would have cared for them if she could have held herself entirely blameless! She must go home by the road, for even the long summer twilight would soon darken into night, and to go by the Gages' house was inevitable; but Cherry had almost decided that she would not stop to see Dilly, after all, but would slip by unobserved if she could, when, just as she stepped from the woods path into the road, there was a great jolting and bumping of the rickety log bridge which spanned the brook, mingled with a rattling and clattering of tins, and from the shadows emerged old Jane's bony frame, followed by the wagon, with its array of tins and brushes, and Dilly perched upon the high seat in front, with a bristling broom on each side of her, as if for a guard. She drew Jane up suddenly, and scowled down at Cherry from under her battered hat.

"What you down here for? You been spyin' round my house I expect," she said, a wave of color sweeping up over her thin freckled face.

"I—I came to see you," faltered Cherry.

"To see me!" echoed Dilly, in amazement. "Be you—is he a-goin' to own up to that lie he told?" Her tone was full of eagerness.

"Phonse didn't tell a lie, Dilly," said Cherry. "He told the truth, but—" Cherry stopped suddenly. What had she been going to do? she asked herself, in affright. To confide to Dilly Gage what Phonse had told her? She must beware of her impulsiveness.

"Don't you darst to say he told the truth! he never!" cried Dilly. "Don't you s'pose I'm agoin' to b'lieve my own father? If you've come down here to try to make me b'lieve he's a-pretendin' and makin' b'lieve, why, then, you jest better go right straight home again."

"I didn't come for that, Dilly," said Cherry, meekly. "I—I thought perhaps you couldn't make much money at tin-peddling; it is so hard for a girl. I—we thought you might be poor."

"Whose door is it a-layin' to if I be poor?" demanded Dilly, in a hard voice, which, nevertheless, threatened to break. "I ain't puttin' money in the bank, nor I didn't expect to. Poor folks has got to be satisfied if they don't go hungry. Some that traded with me first, jest for the fun of it, 'cause I was like a crowin' hen, they've fell off, but I've got my reg'lar customers, and rags is brisk. I have to lick consid'able many for sarcin' me. When it's the loafers round the stores, down to the corner, I jest make faces at 'em, but when they're kind of small so'st I can, I chase 'em and lick 'em. I jest ketched a couple down by the paper-mill and licked 'em good."

"I should think it would be better not to notice them," suggested Cherry. "They would soon get tired of it."

"Great you know about it!" retorted Dilly. "They don't learn folks about tin-peddlin' and takin' sarce down to the 'cademy. You hain't got no business to say nothin' to me, anyhow, and I ain't a-goin' to talk to you."

She chirruped to Jane, and the horse, with visions of supper animating her tired old limbs, started on at a lively pace. Suddenly Dilly pulled her up again, and waited until Cherry came up.

"How did you come down here, and how be you a-goin' to get home?" she demanded.

"I came across lots. I didn't stop to think how late it was, and I took the wrong path," said Cherry.

"Good land! I shouldn't think you did stop to think," scolded Dilly. "It's jest about pitch dark, and how be you a-goin' to get home?"

"I shall walk by the road. Perhaps there'll be a moon soon," said Cherry, not without a little faltering.

"The moon don't rise now till nigh upon ten o'clock, and you'd ought to know it. I should like to know what they do learn you to the 'cademy."

Cherry accepted this rebuke meekly. Ben was continually heaping scorn upon her because she never knew the times of sunrise or moonrise, or the points of the compass.

Cherry trudged along, while Dilly sat upon her wagon, apparently absorbed in thought, and repressing the impatient Jane by absent-minded but emphatic "whoas."

"Here you, Cherry Eastman!" she called, and Cherry stopped, and waited until the long-suffering Jane and the jingling wagon overtook her.

"You hadn't no business to come down here, you know," said Dilly. "You hain't got nothin' to see me for 'thout you can tell me that that long-legged, cross-

lookin' cousin of yours has took back the lie he told. And I hain't no business havin' nothin' to say to you; it looks as if I didn't think nothin' of how poor father's been laid in a lie. I ain't forgivin' you nor nothin', and I don't want you to think I be, but I wouldn't see nobody, if 'twas an Injun savage, walkin' over this road, that's full of rocks and thank-you-marms and mud up to your ankles, and comin' on pitch dark, if 'twas so'st I could give 'em a lift. So now you jest get up here, Cherry Eastman, and I'll carry you home, but don't you open your mouth to say a single word to me as if we was friendly feelin', 'cause we ain't!"

"I would prefer to walk," said Cherry, with some stateliness; but her voice wavered a little as she looked forward into the darkness, and realized how foot-sore and weary she was.

"You'd be sick enough of your bargain before you come to the turnin'," said Dilly. "I don't know as you could get there anyhow. You'd like enough be found a corp. Now jest step up here, as lively as you can. You're a-keepin' this poor old horse cretur a-waitin' for her supper, that's all you're doin' a-standin' there, and father he's a-waitin' for me."

Cherry found it bitter to accept a favor offered in so ungracious a manner. Oh, why had she been so foolish as to place herself in this humiliating position! She could not find her way over that dreadful road in the darkness; she *must* go with Dilly. And Dilly was so imperative she dared not hesitate, lest she should turn back and leave her.

She mounted to the seat beside Dilly in obedient silence, and the unhappy Jane, with one long lingering look back towards the shed where rest and supper awaited her, took up her patient way over the rough road which led to Flying Hill.

Poor Cherry felt completely crushed, and found it a boon to obey Dilly's stern mandate not to say a single word to her.

The silence was unbroken, except by the clattering of the tins and the creaking of the wagon, until Cherry unconsciously shivered with cold. She had become very warm with her scramble through the underbrush, and now the night-air was chilly.

"Be you cold?" asked Dilly, in a not ungentle tone. "Here, you can take this," taking off her own plaid shawl. "You needn't be afraid, 'tain't p'ison; it's jest as clean as can be."

Cherry, not daring to hesitate, allowed herself to be wrapped in the shawl.

"I can kind o' wrap this round me," said Dilly, in a mollified tone, drawing something from the wagon behind her. "I don't expect you noticed it, but it's a hooked rug. I hooked it myself, and it's jest as handsome as new paint, if I do say it. Land o' mercy! what's that?"

Old Jane neighed, trembled, and stood still, and Cherry screamed in terror. Just before them, in the road, was a tall shape, light-colored, almost white in the darkness. It waved its hands to and fro; then, at the sound of Cherry's cry, it turned. A clump of trees hid it, or had it vanished into thin air?

"Oh, Dilly, is it—is it the ghost?" faltered Cherry.

"*Ghost?*" echoed Dilly, in utter scorn. "Who has been tellin' you that stuff? There ain't no such thing. But I'm a-goin' to find out what it is, if 'tain't for nothin' but to stop folks's gossipin' tongues!"

"Oh, oh, don't, Dilly!" cried Cherry, as Dilly jumped from the wagon. "Oh, I don't see how you dare to; and I'm afraid I can't hold Jane, she's so frightened."

CHAPTER VIII.

Dilly Gage sprang from the wagon, in spite of Cherry's terrified remonstrances.

"Scairt? Of course I'm scairt! Folks has got to be scairt in this world. But I'm a-goin' to find out what it is, all the same."

This was all the answer she made to Cherry's appeals to her to come back.

Cherry did not need this confession to know that Dilly was frightened, for the hands which placed the reins in hers had trembled. It was evidently a strong will which directed the movements of Dilly Gage's slender body.

Old Jane was becoming unmanageable with fear; she seemed to be aware of the absence of her mistress, and that strange hands held the reins. Dilly's voice had calmed her at first; now she reared and plunged as vigorously as if she were two instead of twenty, and then suddenly set into a furious gallop.

Cherry sent back one despairing cry: "Oh, Dilly, Dilly, I can't hold her!"

On they went at a wild pace, bumping over rocks and logs, tipping half-way over in ruts and pools, flinging off tins and pails and brushes. At every moment Cherry expected to be flung off herself, and she fancied that the tall shape which they had seen in the road was close behind the wagon. She was cold and numb with terror, but she still clung, almost unconsciously, with one hand to the reins and with the other to the wagon-seat.

Old Jane was not quite wild with terror; at the junction of the woods road with the highway she took to the highway at a less furious speed, but it was in vain that Cherry, with rising hope and courage, tried to stop her. The sound of her voice seemed to increase her fright.

Would she be induced to stop at Flying Hill Farm, or would she go rushing through the village? They were nearing the drive-way. A man with a lantern was coming through the great gate.

"Oh, Philander, Philander!" cried Cherry, in a voice that rang above the clattering tins.

Philander was at old Jane's head. She had stopped, quivering and rearing, but as Philander spoke to and stroked her her head drooped.

"Good land of nater! the poor old cretur is about done for!" exclaimed Philander. "How come you cavortin' round like all possessed, this time of night, Dilly Gage?"

"It isn't Dilly Gage! Help me down, and then, oh, Philander, you must go to the woods road as fast as you can and find Dilly Gage. We met a great tall white thing that stood in the road and sort of wrung his hands, and Dilly followed it to see what it was —oh dear! I don't see how she could!—and old Jane ran away with me—and I don't know what has become of Dilly!"

Philander was wholly absorbed in getting old Jane out of harness. She seemed weak and was staggering.

"I don't calc'late this poor old cretur'll ever go back to the woods road," he said, pitifully. "She might have been good for a consid'able spell of joggin' along, but she's been doin' something that wa'n't joggin' tonight. You'd ought to have knowed, old lady, that

high jinks wa'n't the thing for you, and have took it fair and easy."

Philander was very fond of horses. Cherry could not even make him understand what danger Dilly was in until he had taken care of old Jane. When at length she did make him understand, he was disposed to treat the matter very lightly.

"Land sakes! you two foolish creturs got scairt of a tree, or a cow, or something—gals will," he said, calmly. "There was the time you took Widow Pulsifer's clothes-line for a drove of oxen."

"Philander, will you hurry, or I shall go and get Uncle David to go? Dilly Gage is down there all alone; and—and I don't suppose it was a ghost, as they say—there aren't any; but it was something very queer and large."

"I expect mebbe you'd better go into the house. They're consid'able worried about you, seein' you hain't been heard of sence Miss Rhody see you goin' across towards the woods," said Philander, in his moderate way; "and I'll hitch up Jupiter into the tin-wagon. She's got to have her wagon, anyhow; and I expect she'll want to see her old hoss once more."

"Philander, *don't* say that old Jane is really going to die—*don't* say so!" cried Cherry. "It will be my fault—all my fault."

"'Twa'n't a ghost of your gettin' up, now, was it?" said Philander, with a facetiousness which Cherry felt to be altogether out of place.

"If Dilly hadn't been driving me home—"

Ben came out just then, and Cherry's story found a more appreciative listener than Philander had been.

"A ghost? How jolly! I'm going with you, Philander, and we'll take the old rifle and have a crack at it. You're sure it wasn't a shadow or anything? And

all those people have seen it! Weren't you in luck, Cherry! Yes, I am, too, sorry for the poor old horse and for Dilly Gage. But I'll match her against a ghost any time. I'm sorry for the ghost if Dilly gets him. All ready, Philander? We couldn't stop for Simmy Backup, could we? Simmy would so enjoy a ghost!"

Cherry felt for once inclined to agree with Phonse that Ben was hard-hearted. His delight at the prospect of "having a crack at the ghost" seemed to swallow up every other feeling. He helped Philander to harness Jupiter, the lively young black horse, into the tin-wagon, and they were soon rattling off.

"Do you remember just where I told you that it happened?" Cherry called after them. "On the right-hand side of the road, where the tall woods end, near Stillman's pasture, where the blueberries used to be so thick."

But the wagon made such a noise that it was doubtful whether they heard, and Cherry turned back, anxious and miserable, feeling that she ought to have had the courage to go with them.

Phonse had come out, and she poured out the story of her adventures into his ears with greater fulness than to the others, especially her meeting with Cally Bumpus.

"You don't suppose that it—the ghost—could be Preserved Gage, do you, Phonse?" she said, eagerly. "It doesn't seem as if a man could get himself up to look like that. But it was only for a minute that I saw it, and there was no moon—"

"You don't suppose it was a tree or a shadow, or that you only imagined it, do you? Its waving its hands sounds as if it might be the shadow of a tree, you know," said Phonse.

"I suppose all the other people who have seen something strange down there must have imagined it!" said Cherry, who was losing her patience at these suggestions.

"I think old Gage might be up to a trick like that," said Phonse, meditatively.

"But Dilly doesn't know it if it is he," said Cherry. "She wouldn't have done as she did."

"She might only have been trying to pull wool over your eyes," said Phonse.

"She wasn't. I won't believe it of her," said Cherry, with decision. "She needn't have offered to bring me home; it was good of her—if she was rather cross about it."

But Phonse had found old Jane, and was oblivious of everything else in his pity for her. Philander had made her as comfortable as possible in a stall, but she was breathing with difficulty, and now and then she shook convulsively.

"I'm going to run down the hill and get Dr. Clinch to come and look at her. I think she is suffering, and he may know how to relieve her," he said, running off at full speed.

Dr. Clinch was a veterinary surgeon, a repairer of clocks and watches, a cobbler, and a maker of root-beer, and defied the old saying about a "Jack-at-all-trades" by being good at each of these varied pursuits, and really famous in the root-beer line. Moreover, he had painted with his own hands the signs which were displayed upon his little weather-beaten house: the large one which hung over the door, creaking in the wind, like the sign upon an old English inn, displaying a yellow-and-white horse upon a reddish background; the small one over the window, which showed a clock and a watch, painted with strict impartiality in respect to size; and the one nailed onto the

end of the house, which, under the pictorial representation of boots and shoes, announced, in letters sufficiently large to indicate that this industry led all the rest:

AND WROOT BEER.

Domestic beer-making had almost ceased in Byerly, on account of the inimitable excellence of Clinch's beer, and he guarded the secret of its preparation with jealous care, although, perhaps, if the truth were known, the secret was not very different from that of the old woman in the story who bequeathed it as a priceless legacy to a deserving youth—it was made of roots.

Dr. Clinch was a great friend of Phonse's, although the fact that he showed an interest in the performing pig had of late proved a strain upon Phonse's regard. The doctor, who was a bachelor and did all the housework of his establishment, was busy at his weekly ironing when Phonse arrived, but he did not hesitate to leave the iron scorching his best table-cloth to hurry off with Phonse to old Jane's relief.

In the mean time Cherry had felt it to be unpleasantly necessary to go into the house and report herself. She wished that she need not tell the story all over again; but perhaps Uncle David would take some other measures to find Dilly. Ben and Philander seemed to be thinking chiefly of finding the ghost.

But Uncle David, when she had told her tale, seemed chiefly concerned about her share in it. He looked very much annoyed, as nearly angry as he often looked, and he said, quite severely:

"Loveday, these girls must have a governess, or go away to school, if you can't see that they behave with ordinary propriety. Such escapades as this will make us the talk of the town."

"I don't see why you should say these girls, papa," said Rhoda, in a deeply aggrieved tone. "I'm sure I don't get lost in Roaring Brook woods, or drive around on a tin-peddler's wagon with Dilly Gage, or kill horses, or—or anything; and if Cherry would listen to me—but she never will."

There was no doubt that Rhoda was entitled to her grievance. Her father, perhaps from a strong desire to avoid showing a natural partiality for his daughter, was very apt to make her a sharer in the rebukes which he administered to Cherry.

"It's a good thing if one of you behaves well," he said, carelessly now. And then, as he looked at Cherry's dejected face, he added more gently, almost as gently as Uncle David knew how to speak: "Well, well, it's of no use to fret; it can't be helped now. Go and eat your supper, child, and I'll saddle Rory, and ride down the Roaring Brook road. It's a dark night, and I suppose that girl must be looked after." It was evidently rather a sense of duty than a feeling of sympathy that led Uncle David to go in search of "that girl," and Cherry's sense of guilt was not lessened by the knowledge that he was sacrificing the quiet evening with his books, which he dearly prized after a fatiguing day, for a ride in a chilling east wind, which would be not unlikely to bring on an attack of rheumatism.

"I bring trouble upon every one," thought Cherry, despairingly, "even Rhoda." For Rhoda, who was very sensitive to any reproof from her father, was weeping gently, like a well-ordered heroine, into her dainty handkerchief. Rhoda was never tumultuous, like Cherry, but was so gentle and pretty in her tears that one felt doubly wicked for having caused them.

"I'm orfly sorry, Rhoda, that you should get scolded for me," she said, contritely.

"I do think you might have a little more consideration for me; every one says 'those girls,' as if we were just alike," said Rhoda, brokenly. "If you had cared about those Gage people as I did, it would have been different; but I did something sensible. I can't think what you went down there for."

As Cherry was silent, perhaps because she felt it quite impossible to give a satisfactory account of herself to Rhoda, the latter went on, in an aggrieved tone:

"I think it is very hard to have people talk as if it were Loveday's place to look after us, just as if we were children. It is very unfair to me, at least, for no one could possibly say that I needed looking after. I think papa ought to recognize me as the mistress of the house."

Rhoda said it with some hesitation; the boys hooted at such pretensions in a way that was very trying to her dignity; she liked to be sure that neither of them, nor that dreadful little Simmy Backup, was within hearing.

"Oh, what does it matter? You're always thinking about such things. If you were to blame because Dilly Gage is down in those woods, in the darkness, with something dreadful—a great tall thing, wringing his hands, nobody knows what—chasing her, perhaps, and you'd killed her poor old horse that she thinks everything of, you wouldn't care about being mistress of the house," cried Cherry, her voice shrill with excitement.

"I should never get into such dreadful—*scrapes;*" Ben's favorite word came out oddly in Rhoda's ladylike little tones. "I don't know a girl—not another girl who does."

"I don't care what you say to me, not if you talk till midnight. Sometimes I do; but I have something

else to think of now. You just seem little to me—evthing about you."

Cherry flung out this defiance, still in her shrill, excited tone. She had said "horrid things" to Rhoda before, but always with an underlying consciousness that she should soon repent and ask her forgiveness. Now she was determined that she never would. She felt utterly wicked and miserable. She was in deep waters, and they might as well go over her head. She would never make up with Rhoda! And even this awful resolution scarcely kept her thoughts for a moment from Dilly Gage. She started up suddenly and ran out into the road. Phonse and Dr. Clinch were just going into the barn. She could not endure to hear that old Jane was going to die, and she felt sure there was nothing more hopeful to be heard. She walked up and down the road in the darkness, waiting and listening.

There was the sound of horse's hoofs at last; it was Uncle David riding rapidly.

"Oh yes, they have found her," he said, in answer to Cherry's anxious inquiry; "she had walked almost to the highway. I don't think she pursued the ghost for a great distance. What are you out here for? Go in directly."

Cherry obeyed by going to the barn. Her spirits had risen a little with the knowledge that Dilly was safe. Uncle David's sarcastic tone suggested that he thought Dilly's pursuit of the ghost a pretence. Cherry was sure that it had not been. She knew that Dilly had been frightened, and she remembered the ring of resolution in her voice. Whatever her father might be, Dilly herself was honest; of that Cherry was convinced.

In the barn Dr. Clinch was working over old Jane.

Tildy had brought out hot water, and some stimulant had been poured down old Jane's throat, and she had been vigorously rubbed. No one would believe, seeing Phonse now, that he was constitutionally lazy, and had an almost morbid dislike of the physically disagreeable. He was ready to do anything for the old horse, wholly forgetful of himself.

Uncle David put up Rory himself, and joined the little group around old Jane. Dr. Clinch had moved her out of the stall into freer air.

"A hopeless case, isn't it, doctor?" said Uncle David.

"I'm afeard so, sir," said the doctor. He was a small man, with a very large head, which he had a way of shaking with professional gravity. "I expect her in'ard machinery was about run down, anyhow; come to take a spurt like that, it finished her up."

The rattle of the tin-wagon was heard in the driveway, and in another moment Dilly rushed in. She pushed Phonse aside, and dropping upon the floor, took old Jane's head into her lap. "It's me, Jane," she said.

The dying creature actually made a movement, and tried to make a sound of recognition.

"She knows me! she knows me!" said Dilly, brokenly. "But she's a-dyin', ain't she?"

The little horse-doctor, to whom she looked up appealingly, nodded gravely.

"You can't do nothin', *nothin'* to save her, can you?" cried Dilly; and the little man shook his head.

"I'm afeard not," he said, with a lump in his throat.

"Nothing but an old horse!" said Tildy, tossing her ringlets and tittering.

Dilly turned upon her fiercely. "No, it ain't nothin' but an old horse, but it's about all I ever had to think anything of or that thought anything of me.

We've been comp'ny for one another when 'twas orfle lonesome. And she's done for me, and I've done for her. I've took the quilt off my bed to cover her up many a freezin' night. And I've carried her my victuals when father didn't know it. He's—he's kind of close and scairt for fear there won't be enough, father is. And she's 'most a human cretur, old Jane is; she knows a sight more'n some folks. And there wa'n't never nobody else in the world that was glad to see me—"

"There, there, sissy, it ain't no use," said the little horse-doctor, gently, drawing her away. "The poor cretur's gone."

Dilly's voice had broken into sobs, but she choked them back at once, and arose to her feet with an air of dignity.

"I'm a-goin' to get Jake Pitkin to come after her with his wagon, and have her buried kind of decent. It don't make no difference to me if folks do make fun. They don't know nothin' about it. She was *my* horse. Oh, how be I goin' to get along without her?" The practical side of her loss seemed to have struck Dilly for the first time. "Seems as if you folks was bound to bring trouble on me!" she burst forth, as if she had entirely lost her self-control. "Seems as if you might let poor folks alone that never done you no harm, and never had no good times, nor nothin' that you do. I guess God made Roarin' Brook folks, and he ain't a-goin' to let 'em be sot on always. That's what old Mis' Fickett says, and she's 'most ninety."

Dilly's accusations were received in silence. Uncle David looked annoyed, but patient. Phonse, who had deeply sympathized with her about her horse, feeling surprise that Dilly Gage had feelings like other people, was scowling at her now. Cherry ran to get Dilly



"THE DEATH OF OLD JANE."

her shawl, and put it around her shoulders in silence. She would have liked to thank her, and to say that she was sorry about old Jane, but she shrank from Dilly's snubbing remarks.

Dilly mounted her wagon, and Philander got up beside her. It was plain to see that Philander, who was eminently a man of peace, shrank a little from driving Dilly home.

Dilly called back, after Philander had started the horse, "Look here, you, Cherry Eastman, mebbe *you* ain't so bad."

"She's a case!" remarked Ben. "And now, the next thing is to find out what that ghost is, and Simmy Backup, Philander, and I are going to do it."

CHAPTER IX.

"Ben, you won't shoot until you find out what it is, will you?" said Cherry, anxiously.

It was towards twilight of the next day. Ben and Simmy Backup had been working away at the old rifle, the only weapon of which family prejudices allowed them possession, all day. They had oiled it innumerable times, and polished it until it shone; and this being the first day of vacation, their minds were entirely occupied with the prospect of, as Ben expressed it, "having a crack at the ghost." Ben never shot birds; he was a thoughtful boy, and he had a deep sense of the cruelty of wantonly taking innocent lives, but being a boy, he did delight to fire a gun, and rejoiced in a legitimate opportunity, such as this seemed to him. He had a very vague idea of what the ghost might be. "Of course it isn't a real story-book ghost, you

know," he had said, over and over again, to Simmy Backup, who cherished a secret opinion that it was, and suggested that balls would probably go through it without producing any effect. This was an interesting and comfortable theory, but Ben had far too well-ordered an imagination to accept it. He was somewhat inclined to agree with Loveday that it was probably some wild creature, a late survival of those that used to have their haunts on Tumble Down Hill, in spite of the fact that, as described by Cherry, it was much larger than a wild-cat or a fox, the only animals which had been found in that region within any one's recollection. The fact was that Cherry's description was but lightly regarded; she was popularly supposed to have been too frightened to be a reliable witness. It was somewhat irritating to her to have the opinion still openly maintained by Philander that the terrifying object had been only a shadow or a stray cow. When she inquired, pertinently, whether a cow could walk on two legs, he facetiously reminded her of the cow that jumped over the moon as a proof that acrobatic skill had not been unknown to the race. Cherry thought it Philander's greatest failing that he never knew when to joke, and it must be admitted that such knowledge is a cardinal point in the art of being agreeable.

The information which Ben and Philander had been able to obtain from Dilly Gage had been even less satisfactory than Cherry's account. She had seen something in the road which "stood still and kind of beckoned." When she had pursued it she had heard a rustling in the bushes. Simmy Backup considered the latter fact important, for the ghosts of which he had heard made no noise. He said hopefully, however, that it might have been the wind that rustled the leaves.

Philander said that "before he wore out any shoe-luther a-huntin' ghosts he was a-goin' over to the Widow Pulsifer's to see whether one of her cows hadn't got astray. There was one of 'em that always had a hankerin' for strayin' into the woods."

It was a singular fact that although such wonderful things had happened to Philander, he always suggested the most commonplace explanations of other wonderful happenings. He never would believe that anything surprising had happened to anybody but himself—which was certainly a little provoking.

Cherry had summoned sufficient courage to ask Uncle David what he thought about it, although the subject was apparently annoying to him.

"Don't ask foolish questions, Cherry. How do I know what it is?" he said, impatiently. "People like those in the Roaring Brook settlement have such a love of the marvellous, and such a habit of inaccurate statement, that it is impossible to form an opinion from what they say. It's possible that old Gage—if he is able to go out—may be trying to frighten people, so that he can enjoy a ramble now and then without discovery."

"It wasn't he in the road last night," said Cherry, confidently. "If it had been, I don't think old Jane would have been so frightened. And oh, Uncle David, I don't want to trouble you, but I can't help thinking that if Dilly hadn't been so kind as to bring me home, if I hadn't been there where—where I needn't have gone, she wouldn't have lost her horse. And there's my twenty-five dollars, that Aunt Adam gave me, in the bank; it's more than that now, with the interest. I should like to give it to Dilly towards buying another horse."

"Perhaps you would better. I have been thinking

that something must be done for her," said Uncle David. "Lucius Perry has an old horse, quite good enough for the tin-peddling business, that can be bought for a hundred dollars, or less. I will get your money from the bank, and add enough to it to buy the horse, and you shall give it to Dilly Gage."

"It's—it's so very good of you, Uncle David!" said Cherry, struggling with the break in her voice—for Uncle David didn't like tears, even of gratitude. "And—and I'm not going to be a—a trouble to you long, Uncle David; I'm going to take care of myself."

"There, there, child, don't talk nonsense. Of course you're going to do great things; all the girls are nowadays. Ask Loveday what she thinks of crowing hens. Perhaps you mean to go into business, like your friend Dilly Gage."

Uncle David was smiling and good-natured, so Cherry didn't care how much he made fun of her. Her spirits came up with a bound, and she ran to find Phonse to confide to him her delightful prospect of making amends to Dilly Gage.

Cherry and Phonse had tacitly made up their little disagreement. Phonse understood perfectly that Cherry's exploration in the Roaring Brook settlement had been a substitute for the revelation which she had threatened to make to Uncle David. There had been a moment when, in his extreme sympathy for Dilly, he almost hoped she had told. Dilly could not be dishonest, since she had so great an affection for her old horse. This was illogical, but it was Phonse's view. Dilly's fierce attack had weakened his sympathy, but, on the whole, he had been left with a stronger doubt whether the right had triumphed in the railroad case, and a more unhappy feeling about his own share in the matter.

He was very satisfactorily sympathetic with Cherry's delight in the prospect of a horse for Dilly Gage. He even accepted her invitation to go with her to tell Dilly about it as soon as it was certain that Lucius Perry would sell the horse.

The invitation which Ben extended to him to go hunting for the mysterious apparition Phonse steadfastly declined. His aversion to fire-arms was as great as any girl's.

"They ought not to be allowed to carry that rifle," he said to Cherry. "Of what use is it for Uncle David to make them promise to be careful? They haven't any sense when it's a question of making anything go off. Philander is nothing but a boy when he gets a gun into his hand. Don't you remember how proud he was because his sister's husband's uncle, who had something to do with the Fourth of July celebration over at Chelmsborough, let him touch off the cannon? He said, every day for a month, that he ought to have been a soldier, that ever since he smelled powder he'd been 'a-thirstin' for glory.'"

Cherry admitted that she had observed this sort of weakness in Philander, but she believed, nevertheless, that his discretion might be depended upon in this enterprise. She even expressed the opinion that Ben had plenty of sense.

"Don't tell me. I know boys. They want to kill something," said Phonse, with gloomy superiority.

Ben responded somewhat impatiently to Cherry's appeal not to shoot "until he had found out what it was." It must be admitted that Cherry had said it more than once.

The trio went gayly off at twilight, Philander having gone through his milking and his chores at a great pace, and the boys having entirely neglected to put

Garibaldi through his afternoon exercises, notwithstanding the fact that Simmy hoped to get an "engagement" for him with a "Great Moral and Intellectual Show" which was now making a circuit of the adjoining towns and was expected to appear in Byerly before long.

Philander had previously gone over to the Widow Pulsifer's and discovered that none of her cows had gone astray—that, in fact, the one with a tendency of that kind had long ago reformed; and he was evidently well pleased that he could sacrifice his "shoe-luther" without feeling that it was all "boys' foolishness," as he expressed it, or that he was likely to bring ridicule upon himself. In truth, Philander was as eager for the adventure as either of the boys.

The twilight was already deep in the woods road which led to Roaring Brook, and a rising wind wailed mournfully in the tops of the great pine-trees.

"I don't know but we had better have come some day when Philander could get through his work earlier," said Simmy Backup. It was a noticeable fact that Simmy had ceased to joke, and to boast of his prowess with a gun, just as they turned from the highway into the woods road. Simmy concealed from his nearest friends, sometimes even from himself, the unpleasant truth that he was not lion-hearted, but darkness in the woods was one of the things that would bring it home to him. Even now he insisted to himself that he was not afraid; it was only one of his peculiarities—heroes often had them—to dislike darkness. He had made a gallant stand against this weakness. As long ago as when he wore dresses and his mother put him in his bed at night he had lain in trembling terror, seeing grinning Indian heads in the carved pineapples on the posters of his old-fashioned

bedstead, and goblins in the waving tree-shadows on the wall, and there were times now when the shadow of the old ship's figure-head upon the mantle, bequeathed to them by some seafaring relative, looked exactly like a witch astride a broomstick. Of course he minded none of those things now, and he recalled with pride the fact that he had never cried for a light, never told any one that he was afraid. One may be naturally timid without being a coward, or if one is a coward, it is half the battle not to let any one know it; that was the theory that Simmy Backup half unconsciously adopted, and if he overshot the mark in making all the small boys of Byerly regard him with open-mouthed admiration as a hero who was going to be the most redoubtable cowboy ever heard of, or a pirate like Captain Kidd, or a lion-tamer who should ride in a golden chariot in the circus procession and appear in the performance in a cage with five furious beasts—if Simmy did all this, I am quite sure that it was without any conscious deceit. Like Philander, he "thirsted for glory," and it was only sometimes that he realized that a natural lack of courage stood in the way of his ever attaining his ambitions.

Simmy was afraid he had revealed too much as soon as he had made that remark about having come too late. "We can't see very well, and he might get away, you know," he explained.

"There's goin' to be a moon before ten o'clock if them black clouds don't hide it," said Philander, cheerfully.

Before ten o'clock! Were they to stay until that time in those dark and dreary woods? said Simmy to himself, and wondered what he had been thinking of to be so eager for the expedition. Of course nothing less than this desperate courage was to be expected of

Philander, who, according to his own narratives, had shot seven-headed panthers in the Goorygilloo Mountains, and a shark that had swallowed a steamer in the Polar Sea. (Geographical indefiniteness and discrepancy were not thought to detract in the least from the charm of Philander's stories.)

"'Twas jest right along about here that they see the cretur — or thought they did; 'twon't do to put no great dependence on gals," said Philander, shaking his head wisely. "We'll kind of walk along towards the settlement, some of us inside the fence and some of us outside."

"I think I'll keep outside the fence," said Simmy, quickly. "It was outside when they saw it, you know," he added.

"Land sakes! I don't expect it's nothing but a wild-goose chase," said Philander. "But mebbe it'll kind of make the women-folks feel easier in their minds. I expect we might go through this piece of woods clear to the settlement forty times without comin' acrost it —if 'twas anything more'n a shadder."

"I shall holler out, 'Halt there, or I'll fire!'" said Simmy, who, reassured by Philander's doubts, was beginning to feel more valiant.

"Perhaps we'd better go and get some of those fellows at the settlement who have seen it to go with us," suggested Ben.

"We'll keep along towards the settlement anyhow; there's where it 'pears mostly," said Philander.

He had climbed the fence and was going into the deep woods, and Ben followed him.

"I b'lieve I'll keep along in the road," said Simmy. "You want your lantern, don't you, Philander? I wish I'd brought one."

"We don't want to light the lantern anyhow if we

can help it," said Philander, with decision. "'Twould be apt to frighten the cretur away."

In another moment Philander's voice rang out from the woods.

"Simmy! Simmy Backup! what be you a-whistlin' for? Be you a-tryin' to scare the cretur away?"

Simmy felt aggrieved that Philander shouldn't understand that it was absolutely necessary for a boy to whistle to keep up his courage under such circumstances.

"I b'lieve I'll go into the woods with them," he said to himself. "I'm not afraid, but it's orfle lonesome. Besides, they won't keep along near the road all the way. I thought by the sound of Philander's voice that they were getting farther away."

But when Simmy approached the fence and peered into the darkness of the woods he drew back.

"I should have to go a good ways to find 'em," he reflected, "and if I keep hollerin' Philander 'll be mad; he's so afraid of making a noise. It isn't a bit like Ben to go off and leave a fellow like this, and not care whether he's all alone or not. He's so excited about finding the thing that he doesn't think of anything else; but if he really should I guess he'd be frightened enough!"

And then Simmy sprang back suddenly. His heart beat like a trip-hammer, and he fairly shook with terror. A huge black object was close upon him. Simmy wondered how it was possible that he had not seen it coming. It was almost near enough to seize him. He ran back a little way; the great black object seemed to follow him, but he was not quite sure that it did.

Simmy determined to take himself in hand, like a man.

"I'm not going to holler, anyhow!" he said to him-

self, setting his teeth firmly together. "If I only had the rifle I'd say, 'Hullo there! who are you? Halt, or I'll fire.'"

But Philander had the rifle, and there was no knowing how far away Philander might be.

"I think I'll speak to it, anyway," said Simmy to himself. But it was very difficult; he didn't seem to have any voice, or if he had it had slipped away down into his boots. Simmy thought of the Spartan boy, and of "him who held the bridge in the brave days of old," and of Casabianca on the burning deck, and by a mighty effort he recovered his voice.

"Stop there, now! Who are you?" he called, in a stern and challenging tone, which was certainly calculated to conceal the quaking of his heart.

There was no answer, but the huge object seemed to be coming nearer.

Simmy turned to run. He hated to, but he had his own opinion about what Casabianca or the bridge fellow would have done in the Roaring Brook woods road, in the dark, with a huge creature like that pursuing him.

Just at that moment he heard voices which sounded very near.

"Philander! Ben! quick! I've got him! Bring the rifle, quick!"

Ben and Philander both came over the fence at a bound.

"Where is it? where? where?" they cried in chorus.

"See! it isn't white, it's orfle black, and when I first saw it it was galloping right at me!" said Simmy, in an awe-stricken whisper.

Philander had lighted his lantern, finding it impossible to make his way in the woods without a light. He advanced towards the object at which Simmy pointed,



"'TO THINK OF YOUR GETTIN' SCAIRT OF THIS OLD BLACKENED TREE TRUNK.'"

holding up his lantern, and he laughed a great roaring laugh which echoed through the woods.

"Well, I snum, Simmy Backup! To think of your gettin' scairt of this old blackened tree-trunk, that's stood here on the aidge of the burnt piece till all of us knowed it by heart! I don't want to hurt your feelin's, Simmy, but I expect you'd ought to be at home 'long of your mother, I really expect you had! Come a-gallopin' right towards you, did it? Well, now, I wouldn't have expected such doin's of that old burnt tree, long as I've knowed it!"

It was hard, very hard, especially as Ben laughed, too, and indulged in a few little jeers of his own. As good a fellow as Ben was, he couldn't help being a boy. It was so easy to see, with a lantern, what that old blackened tree-trunk was! He couldn't possibly understand how he could have thought it was coming towards him. And yet, when one was hurrying along, in the darkness, with a fast-beating heart and an expectation of seeing something, to help on one's imagination, that was really not very extraordinary.

Simmy said to himself that it ought to be a consolation that although he had always been a coward no one had ever found him out or suspected him before, but this fact seemed rather to add to the bitterness of his mortification. (I have reason to think that Ben had had suspicions on this subject which he never confided to any one. Although he was sometimes quite overcome by his sense of humor, Ben knew how to be a friend.)

"Look-a-here! If these ain't the curousest tracks I ever did see, right along here by this burnt tree!" exclaimed Philander. "You can foller 'em right acrost the road, in the mud, and right there the cretur must have gone over the fence into the woods! Now, what kind of a four-legged cretur that was it beats me to

tell! 'Twa'n't a beef cretur, nor a horse, that's certain. The ground's consid'able soft along towards the swamp, and right down muddy in spots. If the cretur went that way we could track him easy enough, if 'twas daytime. I don't know but what we could with the lantern. I declare, Simmy, for all we laughed at you, I don't know but what the credit of findin' that there *appearition* will belong to you, for we might never have noticed them tracks if we hadn't been lookin' partickler at that tree! I snum if they don't look like great paws! Well, I always run of an idee 'twas a four-legged ghost."

"Oh, don't let's wait till to-morrow," cried Ben, excitedly.

"See, the tracks are quite fresh, and they're as plain as can be on the other side of the fence." He had seized the lantern from Philander's hand, and was holding it over the fence. "Come on! it's worth the while to take some trouble now we know there really is something."

Simmy was over the fence almost as soon as Ben was. His courage had mounted with the occasion. Philander followed, grumbling a little. To tell the truth, Philander would have much preferred to defer the expedition until daylight.

CHAPTER X.

It was difficult to follow the tracks through the bushes by the light of the lantern; so difficult that if they had not soon led into a wide path—once a logging road, and the same one by which Cherry had gone "across lots" to the Roaring Brook settlement—even

Ben might have lost his zeal. Having reached the path, the maker of those queer tracks had evidently gone comfortably along it, having, apparently, a taste for easy walking, and no objection to meeting a traveller.

"Philander, don't you think it may be a panther?" said Ben, who had stopped, for the twentieth time, to peer at the tracks.

"There ain't no tellin'. There's so many creturs' tracks that look consid'able alike," said Philander. "But how a wild cretur come in these woods—"

"Don't be afraid, Ben. If you'll let me take the rifle, Philander, I'll go ahead," said Simmy, stoutly.

"I guess I'll keep holt of the rifle. I hain't forgot what the squire's directions was. Besides, we can't afford to use up our ammunition on burnt stumps," said Philander, cruelly.

Simmy kept very near to Philander's elbow, but then he may have been influenced by a regard for the rifle. Fire-arms were not approved of in Simmy's family; he had never fired at any more exciting game than a crow—which went cawing on its way far above his head. Now his heart burned within him to fire the rifle at—a panther, perhaps! Ben knew a great deal about most things. If Ben thought it was a panther that had made those tracks, Simmy thought he was probably right.

The terrors that Simmy endured in those dark woods, with awful shadows which looked like anything in the world but shadows, following and gliding along beside him, with strange, startling noises overhead and underfoot, cannot be lightly told. Once he barely escaped crying out with fright; it was when a tall white birch, its leafless branches draped with light-colored swaying moss, appeared suddenly before him. Here was the

ghost, he thought—the very one that had waved its hands at Cherry and Dilly Gage! How glad he was that he had set his teeth tightly together and smothered the cry, when he saw what it was. They would never have ceased to jeer at him if they had known that he had been frightened by another tree!

"And now the thing is to find out which one of these tracks the cretur took," said Philander, as they came to the old logging camp, where the three paths branched off, the place where Cherry had gone astray the day before.

"Hold up the lantern, Philander! Here are the tracks in this path, the one that leads right down to the settlement," called Ben.

"And here they are in this one!" said Simmy, who had gone a few steps, only a very few, alone, into another path, and was feeling about on the ground in the darkness.

"Well, they're in every one, and that's a fact," said Philander, who had been exploring the third path for quite a distance. "The cretur must have been kind of promenadin' round here, and takin' things easy. Don't seem as if it could have been a wild cretur! But I'll tell you what, boys, it ain't a mite of use for us to foller him to-night, if he's gone down one of them paths that fetch up in the underbrush. It's as much as anybody can do to get through that in broad daylight. We'll jest go down towards the settlement, and if we don't find him, why, that'll fetch us out into the road again, and we can get home easy. The fact is there ain't no sense in such a hunt as this, exceptin' by daylight."

"We sha'n't find him, then, I'm afraid," said Ben. "No one has ever caught a glimpse of him by daylight. I'm afraid Philander is getting old," he added,



"'HERE ARE TRACKS,' SIMMY, SAID WHO HAD GONE A FEW STEPS INTO ANOTHER PATH, AND WAS FEELING ABOUT ON THE GROUND."

in a low tone, to Simmy. "You and I might go alone down into the underbrush."

"We—we might," said Simmy. "And I—I would like to, only—only, you know, they've seen him down at the settlement. Perhaps we should be more likely to find him down that way."

If Simmy began his answer haltingly, he ended it with the air of having originated a brilliant idea. And if Ben permitted himself to smile, knowingly, it was under cover of the darkness.

"Hark! what's that?" exclaimed Ben. "I thought I heard a noise in the old logging camp. There it is again! Do you suppose there is any one in there? Philander, bring back the lantern! I'm going to find out what that noise is."

Philander, with the lantern, had taken to the settlement path. He was, to use his own expression, "not nigh so frisky as he was thirty years ago," and getting very tired with his day's work, was in the habit of betaking himself to his bed at a very early hour. Although the mysterious tracks had aroused a hunter's eagerness in him at first, aching joints and sleepiness were now leading him to return to his original doubts whether the hunt were not all "boys' foolishness."

He retraced his steps somewhat reluctantly. "I expect it ain't nothin' but the wind, or the old logs a-creakin'. Folks can always hear noises if they're a-listenin' for 'em; 'tain't never so still as what it appears to be," said Philander, "and you boys are so kind of wrought up that I expect you can hear a sight of noises that ain't there."

Nevertheless, Philander himself, when he came near, heard a noise as of some one moving about in the old logging camp. And when they tried the door they found that it was fastened.

"That door has always stood open!" whispered Ben, excitedly.

"I run of an idee that it's always been fastened," said Philander. "I can't exactly remember, but they'd most likely have left it so. That window is boarded up, anyhow"—shaking it vigorously. "Mebbe some tramp has got in there for a night's shelter. Holloa, there! Anybody inside?"

There was no answer, and the noise had ceased.

"I'll tell you what it is, boys," said Philander. "If there's anybody there it's old Jakey Fern, the herb doctor. He lays round most anywhere he can, summer nights; and summer before last he stayed in this old camp as much as six weeks. He won't go to the poor-house, exceptin' for winter-quarters. When he has one of his cranky fits he won't speak to nobody."

"Those tracks are all around the door," said Ben, doubtfully.

"They're a-goin' along the path *by* the door," said Philander. "Mebbe you think a wild cretur has fastened himself in there? If he had, I don't know what we could do about it. We couldn't break that door down, and it wouldn't do to go to firin' into it permiscoous. There, it beats all how foolish boys can be! The beasts of the forest don't take to houses where folks has lived, like that. I calc'late we hain't no manner of business to rout up old Jakey Fern, 'thout he's a mind to let us, so we'd better be goin' on. 'Long about the forepart of to-morrow afternoon, if I can get away, I'm a-goin' to foller them tracks down into the underbrush; that is, if we don't come acrost nothin' down towards the settlement."

There was nothing to do but to follow Philander, who was in possession of the lantern and the rifle. When one came to think of it, it did seem unlikely

that the panther—Ben had quite decided that it was a panther, or a very large wild-cat—would fasten himself into the logging camp. He followed Philander with reluctant steps, however; he wanted to go down into the underbrush; he thought it was hard that they should lose, perhaps, the greatest chance of a lifetime for a real hunt because Philander was sleepy. He tried to console himself by planning to go down into the underbrush to-morrow without Philander. Simmy would not, perhaps, be a great ally in such a desperate encounter with a wild beast as he had read of. Simmy, he was afraid, might run away; although, in fact, he had never known Simmy to run away. If he did, then there would be all the more opportunity for him to cover himself with glory. He remembered that Hez Lowry, who lived at the foot of Tumble Down Hill, had told him that he had seen the tracks of wild beasts there. Philander had scouted the idea, but there was no doubt that Philander was growing very dull and slow; he must have been a very different person when he drew the teeth of the seven-headed dragon on the Goorygilloo Mountains. Now he had an opportunity to track a wild beast to his lair, and he wanted to go home and go to bed!

Simmy's reflections were of a different nature from Ben's. The noise in the logging camp had destroyed the last vestige of his courage. When it came to the point, Simmy felt that it could never be endurable to him to meet either a panther or a tramp, except by daylight. It was as well, he thought, to look one's natural limitations in the face. He had an awful conviction that if they had stayed at the door of that logging camp for another minute, he should have been obliged to openly show the white feather, and take to his heels.

He hurried away from it with a thankful heart, and once or twice he looked back apprehensively; there was certainly somebody or something in there, and he knew, though he had not said so, lest he should lead Philander to persevere in getting in, that old Jakey Fern, the half crazy herb doctor, was ill at the poor-house with an attack of erysipelas.

His shoe, which had become untied, stuck in the mud so firmly that it came off. As he stopped to put it on, Simmy looked back once more, furtively, towards the logging camp. From the great square smoke-hole at the top of the building arose, slowly, a tall shape! It loomed huge and dark against the sky, which had been lightened by the rising moon, only partially obscured by thin clouds. Simmy thought of the resolves he had made to be a good boy; of the time he thrashed Jimmy Phillipson, who proved not to have stolen his knife, and wondered, queerly enough, whether they would give his bicycle and all his fish-hooks to little Caleb; and at the same time he was tugging at his shoe, so thickly covered with mud that it would not go on, and trying to say his prayers. He suddenly shook off the numb terror that held him, and ran, shoe in hand. As he passed Ben and Philander he called out:

"I'm—I'm hurrying along to wash my shoe in the brook. I guess maybe you'd better hurry a little, too. I—I—guess it's getting late!

"If I should tell them they'd go back, and I should have to go, too, only I couldn't, or they'd say it was another tree, and make fun. Any other fellow can think what he likes, but I believe there are Orfle Things, ghosts, or whatever-you-call-ems!" said Simmy to himself.

He was in the road, very near to the twinkling

lights of the settlement, when Ben and Philander overtook him.

"Simmy has been frightened again by something," thought Ben, shrewdly, "but he'll never tell me what it was."

But in this latter conclusion Ben was mistaken. Simmy was very reticent that night, and in extreme haste to get home; he said he didn't know but little Caleb might want to play checkers; but the next morning, while they were breakfasting at Flying Hill Farm, he came to the window, and beckoned to Ben with a mysterious air.

Daylight had brought a stout heart to Simmy, as it always did—in fact, there are older and wiser people than Simmy who depend upon it for that office—and he regarded his conduct of the night before with scornful wonder. He had determined to make a full confession to Ben as an atonement.

They repaired to the great wood-pile behind the shed—a favorite resort when privacy was desirable, and where one could whittle to assist one's flow of language—and Simmy, with some difficulty, but with stern resolve keeping down the choking in his throat, told Ben what he had seen.

"You *saw* it, and you *ran away?*" exclaimed Ben, incredulously. "And you didn't tell!"

"Sometimes a feller is born so 't he—he runs away orfle easy," said Simmy, with his eyes on the ground, and industriously digging a hole in it with his heel—"'Specially when it's dark. Afterwards it seems as if it must have been some other feller."

"*Phonse* wouldn't have done it," said Ben, in a tone of extreme disgust. He had forgotten everything in his disappointment and irritation. But the look on Simmy's face suddenly aroused his sympathy. "It

was pretty scarey in those woods," he said, quickly. "Many a fellow wouldn't have liked it. I don't suppose I should have, myself, if I hadn't been too much excited to think about it. I never saw a fellow that was less afraid than you are—sometimes; there was the time you thrashed that great hulking Bill Porter for bullying his little lame cousin."

"Oh, I can thrash a feller when he needs it as much as Bill Porter did; that's nothing," said Simmy; but a little thrill of satisfaction in his voice showed that his self-respect had been somewhat restored by Ben's reminder. "It's queer, Ben, but I can't seem to get over being just like a small shaver about the dark. If—"

"As much as ten feet high?" said Ben, eagerly, returning to the subject of the mysterious appearance, which was much more interesting than poor Simmy's infirmity. "You don't really suppose, now, that it was as tall as that? Things will look taller, you know, when when a fellow's afraid. What did it look like?"

"Well, it was big and stout, and had arms. It was orfle tall; anyway, I should think it looked like some animal—an elephant, or maybe a very big bear, only they wouldn't stand up on their hind-legs like that. We'll go and see, won't we?" Simmy spoke with resolution, although with some effort.

"Go? I should think so! And we needn't say anything about it to Philander. He was mean about the rifle. Father didn't say that he was to keep it all the time. I asked him, and he said he didn't."

"I hope Philander won't be disappointed," said Simmy, as they went out at the gate, Ben with the rifle over his shoulder. It was the first sign of hesitation that he had given.

"Oh, if he really cared, I wouldn't go without telling him," said Ben. "Perhaps it would be mean. He's

down in the south meadow; we'll call to him as we go by."

"We don't want to do anything mean," said Simmy, earnestly. "And — and it's such an orfly big thing, three might be better'n two."

Ben looked at him keenly.

"Now, Simmy, if you're afraid you'd better back out now. If you back out after we get there—"

"Ben, if I do I hope he'll eat me; so there, now!"

They stopped at the fence and called out to Philander:

"We're going down to the logging camp. We *know It's* round there. Don't you want to come?"

Philander leaned on his hoe, and shook his head vigorously.

"I'll be right along here when you fetch home the skin," he said, facetiously. "Mebbe you'll make up your minds to fetch home the carkiss, and will want some help carryin' it."

Ben walked on with an air of dignity, and Simmy followed.

"Look out that that old rifle don't kick. That's the most dangerous cretur you'll meet, I'll warrant," Philander called after them.

"I declare if them wa'n't queer kind of tracks that we see down there in the Roarin' Brook woods last night," he remarked to old Simon Gillam, Byerly's one representative of the colored race who was helping him with the hoeing. "But things do look kind of queer by lamplight."

"Dey sutt'nly has an onnatchal look," said old Simon. "I calc'late mebbe they wa'n't nothin' but ox tracks after all. You see, it don't stand to reason that there could be a bear or a wild cretur of any kind in them woods."

And Philander ceased to look doubtfully, and with some evident longing, after the boys, and applied himself vigorously to his hoeing.

Simmy was feeling quite strongly by this time that the hunting-party was decidedly too small, and that there ought to be a man or two in it. He said to himself that it was foolhardy for two boys like Ben and him to venture alone into the very lair of such a huge, mysterious creature as he had seen. In his determination to get the better of his cowardice he had lost sight of the real danger. Ben would refuse to be shown that view of the matter. It was not that Ben was lacking in sense, but because, as Simmy shrewdly suspected, he held a private opinion that Simmy had seen only another tree—it would be quite possible to be deceived by one that rose tall above the logging camp—or a cloud or a shadow. He felt that it was almost impossible to bring himself to say anything to Ben about the danger. Ben would think only that his cowardice was coming to the front again.

Ben was a good shot with the rifle, that was one comfort. He (Simmy) would be the one to be torn to pieces, and, in his desperate mood, Simmy said that it would not much matter.

However, as they turned into the path which led to the logging camp he did muster sufficient courage to say to Ben:

"If people knew what there was down in these woods there'd be as many as twenty or thirty men hunting here this morning."

"Then we've got the start of 'em," said Ben, cheerfully.

"If—if anything should happen to me, I—I—want you to have my new patent fish-pole," he said.

But Ben was so far ahead that he did not hear,

and Simmy decided that he would not repeat the remark.

He tried to derive a little consolation from the reflection that Philander must have felt sure that there was no danger, or he would have objected to their going. Perhaps Ben with the rifle was a match for anything. And he—at least he would not run! Simmy thrust his hands deep into his trousers-pockets, pursed his lips for a whistle, and trudged sturdily on after Ben, already in sight of the logging camp.

But Simmy was mistaken in thinking that Philander felt no uneasiness about the boys' expedition. He threw down his hoe suddenly.

"I expect it's foolishness, but I can't help feelin' oneasy about them youngsters. You see, I left the rifle onloaded out in the tool-house when I went to bed last night; I always calc'late to, bein' there's boys 'round; and I found out that that Ben of ourn had been and loaded it again the very last thing before he went to bed, and I kind of suspected by that that he meant to go down in them woods bright and early. I run of an idee that it's always resky for boys to have a gun. The squire he ain't cautious enough; he says a gun is a lib'ral edication for a boy; but, thinks I, his edication ain't nigh so likely to be cut short if the gun ain't loaded, so I jest onloads it again, onbeknownst to Ben. And now I can't help a-thinkin' where'd them innercents be if they should come acrost a wild cretur down in them woods, with nothin' but an empty rifle; so if them beans ain't never hoed I'm obleeged to foller 'em." And off went Philander as fast as his long legs would carry him in pursuit of the boys.

CHAPTER XI.

In the mean time two other members of the family at Flying Hill Farm were planning a trip to the Roaring Brook settlement.

Lucius Perry had brought the horse, and exhibited him in the yard, and after a great deal of talking, and a delay which seemed interminable to Cherry, a bargain was concluded, and Lucius Perry went his way with a roll of bills in his pocket.

"There, the horse is yours, Cherry, and you can make up to your friend for her loss as soon as you please," said Uncle David, kindly. And then he frowned a little, as if he were afraid he had been too kind, and added: "I don't know whether you can realize that it is a misfortune to have been obliged to spend all the money you had, but I hope it will teach you to behave as a young girl should, and not like a boy. And mind, I don't want you to go down to that Roaring Brook settlement. Philander can take the horse down."

"Oh, Uncle David, please let me take it—Phonse and me!" cried Cherry, eagerly. "Dilly is so — so queer and proud. She would not understand. She might be angry."

Uncle David smiled somewhat scornfully, as if he did not consider Dilly Gage's anger a matter of much moment. But he looked at Cherry's eager face, and said, after a moment's hesitation:

"Well, go this time, but be sure that Phonse goes with you; and if there's any more gadding about alone

after dark, or any more trouble of any kind, I'll send you away to school—you and Rhoda too."

"Uncle David, that wouldn't be fair, for it's never Rhoda—never; it's always I," said Cherry. "And I wish you wouldn't say—say those things, because it makes Rhoda think I'm awfully to blame."

"The innocent often have to suffer with the guilty in this world," said Uncle David. "It ought to be a reason the more for you to try to behave better. I suppose it is hard that my quiet little Rhoda should be called a tomboy."

Rhoda had come out, and stood beside him in the door-way, and he rested his hand lightly on her head.

"Everybody *will* say 'those girls,'" said Rhoda, with a deep sigh. "And, oh, papa, you will tell Cherry that she's not to ride the pony barebacked, won't you? It's such a dreadful habit! It's really not nice; it's quite untidy."

"I never did but—but twice, when I was in a great hurry. I mean not lately," said Cherry, growing very red in the face.

"Oh, every one knows that you always used to, and like a boy, too! I remember the day when Dr. Wallace and all their city visitors saw you boy-fashion!"

Rhoda's tone expressed severest reprobation, and Cherry stood guiltily silent, with tears of mortification in her eyes. Rhoda might have refrained from bringing up her youthful errors before Uncle David just now, she thought.

"Oh, come along, Cherry," said Phonse. "She sets my teeth on edge, her hair is so smooth."

Rhoda was really very pretty to look at, with her sleek, satiny head, her regular, doll-like little features, pink cheeks, and soft brown eyes; but Phonse was in one of his irritable moods this morning; besides,

he always declared that Rhoda's sand-papered look "offended his artistic tastes."

Once on the black pony (saddled in proper fashion), with Phonse beside her, mounted on the new purchase, which was soon to draw Dilly Gage's tin-wagon, Cherry's naturally joyous spirits asserted themselves again, especially as the horse, which was not accustomed to a rider, performed some very queer antics, occasionally planting his fore-feet stubbornly, and refusing to move until he had looked over each shoulder at Phonse, constantly meandering from one side of the road to the other, and occasionally relieving the monotony of his performance by turning round and round several times. And all these erratic movements were carried on mildly and gently, although persistently.

"I think he is a race-horse, or a circus horse, or something queer," said Cherry, between her paroxysms of laughter. "Oh, don't get down, Phonse, you do look so funny!"

But Phonse looked as if he thought that an additional reason for dismounting; he was too sensitive to like being laughed at even by Cherry; and, in fact, to look funny is generally to afford more pleasure to spectators than to one's self.

"Please don't get down just here, Phonse!" insisted Cherry. "This is just where Dilly Gage and I saw the —the great tall thing. And it's always so dark and lonesome here, I want to ride fast."

"You may ride just as fast as you can make the pony go, but I shall never mount that beast again!" said Phonse, with dignity.

"You don't suppose he will behave badly in the tin-wagon, do you, Phonse?" asked Cherry, anxiously.

"I should think Dilly Gage and her wagon might settle him down," said Phonse. "Oh, he doesn't like

to be ridden, that's all. You needn't worry; he's *too* good for a tin-peddler's— What's that? Whoa! whoa!"

The report of a rifle had rung out sharply, so near them that the pony had started and reared violently.

"I don't know what it means," said Phonse. "It's too early in the season to shoot any birds that there are in the woods."

"Boys will fire guns at any time of year," said Cherry, with an emphasis which left no doubt as to her opinion of boys who fired guns. But she had by this time calmed the pony, who was far too fat and lazy to permit himself any unnecessary agitation." Hurry a little, won't you, Phonse, so we can get out of the way before it comes again. You don't suppose Ben and Simmy are there, and firing at—at the ghost, do you, Phonse?"

"I think they had too much of it last night to go again so soon. I forgot to look for those queer tracks they saw; the road is all cut up with wheels, anyway. I don't see how they could have seen them. Philander must have been telling stories, and it was pretty dark, you know. I don't think they saw them 'out'n a book,' as Philander says."

The new horse permitted himself to be led by the bridle with the greatest docility, and showed not the least objection to the noise of the gun.

"I think we'd better hitch the horses here," said Cherry, alighting just before they reached the house, and where a little clump of trees hid the horses from sight. "And I want to see Dilly first, alone, and tell her about the horse before she sees him. She's crosser sometimes than others. I think I'm getting to know a little how to take her."

"I really believe you're afraid of her," said Phonse.

"But you're no more so than I am," he added, candidly.

Phonse hitched the horses to a tree, and after Cherry had gone on towards the house he stood still—as long as it is in the nature of a boy to do so. As every one knows, that is not very long, and he soon wandered down a little path, half lost in stones and weeds, which ran along the side of the house towards the brook. He thought he should like to see how the brook looked from the back of the house, which was perched upon a bank at its very edge, and was always expected to sail away in the spring freshets. He said to himself that he should have plenty of time on his hands before Cherry got Dilly Gage smoothed the right way; even if Dilly were inclined to be gracious, there would have to be just about so much talk—girls always had to have it.

The brook was very swift just here; it was strange, Phonse thought, that the pool just below should be so still. He scrambled up over the pile of loose stones, which seemed to have been thrown up as a protection to the house, that he might have a better view of the pool, with its fringe of alders. Phonse never failed to have an eye for a pretty bit of scenery. The stones were loose, and it was difficult to find a secure foothold; he caught at a corner of the house, and then at the fastening of a blind for support. How pretty it was! The brook, tumbling over some great stones, tossed its spray into the air like a small Niagara, and in this close proximity its roar was almost deafening.

"I don't wonder that the old tin-peddler is deaf, and I should think Dilly would be," said Phonse to himself. "I'm glad the railroad company isn't responsible for that!" As Phonse turned he looked at the window, which was just behind him. The blinds were closed, but one could see that the shade was drawn, for a slat was

broken in the blind; and the shade was not so closely drawn but that there was a chink through which could be seen a bed, open, and looking as if some one had just arisen from it. Beside it stood a small table, with medicine bottles and a glass and spoon.

"That must be the old man's room. There is only one other sleeping-room, evidently, and that's in the upper story."

And then the full significance of the empty bed flashed upon Phonse's mind.

"Where can *he* be?" He said it aloud in his excitement.

He looked into the window again, and then drew back in sudden shame.

"I won't do such a contemptible thing as to look into people's windows — even into Preserved Gage's —even to find out whether he is a humbug. I didn't mean to; it just happened as I turned round. I never thought of doing such a thing, though I did want awfully to find out." Phonse rushed down over the stones, almost into the brook, in too great excitement to make his slow way over the stones, around the corner of the house. Below the pile of stones his head was on a level with the cellar window, and again, quite unintentionally, Phonse, as he ran by, looked through the window. A tall, stooping figure, with a grizzly head, clothed in a long night-gown, stood by a high shelf eating baked beans with a knife, out of an earthen bean-pot! It was the swiftest of glances, but a shaft of sunlight threw the figure into strong relief on the dusky background of the cellar.

"Cherry! Oh, Cherry, come here!" he called, softly, as, turning around the corner of the house, he saw Cherry sauntering along towards the horses, with an expression of disappointment on her face. "No, no!

don't come here! I don't mean it. We won't spy on people, if they are humbugs!" Phonse had as keen a sense of honor, in some directions, as if he were incapable of allowing some one else to do his arithmetical problems.

"Dilly isn't at home. I'm so disappointed," said Cherry. (Phonse's call had been too low for her to hear, for he had forgotten that Preserved Gage was very deaf, and felt the need of caution about so important a discovery.) "I knocked and knocked, and no one came, and then I walked down towards the bridge a little way and found a small tow-headed boy at play, and he said Dilly had hired Jed Trefry's old horse and gone tin-peddling. I wish we had come earlier. I might have known Dilly would find some way to do her work, she's so—so determined."

"You seem to think, after all, that that girl is great things. Just wait till I tell you what I've just seen," said Phonse.

And Phonse poured into Cherry's startled ears a graphic description of the sights he had witnessed through the Gages' windows.

"You're sure it was he? Of course it was if his bed was empty. And I was just beginning to think he had been so badly wronged! I couldn't keep it out of my mind. And you, Phonse, you felt worse than I did," cried Cherry, in great excitement.

"A fellow never frets like a girl about such things," said Phonse, gruffly, trying to hide the tremor in his voice.

"Although you wouldn't tell about Chissy Fenwick," pursued Cherry, "I think you ought to have told, Phonse. I think you ought to, now, because Preserved Gage probably did mean to tell the truth about that."



"A TALL, STOOPING FIGURE, WITH A GRIZZLY HEAD, CLOTHED IN A LONG NIGHT-GOWN."

"If I had, the jury might have believed in him. It happened just right," said Phonse.

Cherry shook her head decidedly. "You never in all the world can make a right happening by doing wrong," she said.

"Now go to being preachy, just as a fellow begins to take a little comfort in finding out that he hasn't helped to wrong people, and keep them horribly poor. It's just like you," said Phonse. "I suppose it makes you feel badly to find out what a horrid cheat that girl is. I was always pretty sure of it. I was afraid that poor old horse didn't have enough to eat, and that was what made her give out so, and I felt as if I were to blame for it. A fellow doesn't like to feel that way, if he isn't—isn't soft, like a girl. But now you see that old sneak didn't get hurt at all. He's just been taking life easily, and scooting round nights frightening people. I dare say he's got a lot of money—old stockings full of gold-pieces, most likely, or maybe a bed stuffed with bank-notes instead of feathers, like the man Philander knew. And that girl goes tin-peddling just to pretend that they've been dreadfully injured, and make people pity them."

"I can't make it seem true of Dilly, Phonse," said Cherry, earnestly. "Of course she isn't—isn't *nice* in lots of ways; she hasn't any chance to be. Rhoda might make faces if she had been brought up down here in the Roaring Brook settlement."

"Phew! Well, if you haven't an imagination, Cherry Eastman! *Rhoda!* A fellow might really get to like her if he thought she would have. It isn't an attractive habit, generally speaking, I'll admit, but it softens a fellow's heart towards Rhoda just to imagine her doing anything that isn't prim."

"But Dilly does seem honest," continued Cherry,

whose mind was full of more interesting matters than Rhoda's characteristics. "I always think that honesty is one of the things that show. You find out whether a person is honest sooner than anything else. There's ever so much difference among the girls at school. They all mean to be, I suppose, but there are some that you're always *sure* of. You know that the least little thing they say is absolutely true, and that they would never take a bit of unfair advantage for no matter how much gain to themselves. It's very comfortable," Cherry sighed. "I wish that you and I—"

And then she stopped suddenly, Phonse was frowning so gloomily; and she had resolved never to refer again to those unhappy arithmetic lessons. "In spite of everything," she went on, hurriedly, "Dilly Gage always makes me feel as if she were like that, true and *dependable.*"

"Oh, anybody could pull wool over *your* eyes," said Phonse. "There are lots of fellows that are square just as long as it's easy enough, but when it comes hard, why, then it's another thing. There was Tommy Taylor, I had trusted him *for years.*" Phonse's tone was intensely gloomy. "I could lend him my microscope and my art journal. You could swap knives with him and not get cheated, and you could tell him any *common* secret, but I told him where I'd found a musk-rat's nest, and that was too much for him. He went and killed every one of 'em—little fellows not so long as my hand, bright-eyed and *so* pretty! Ben thrashed him; it was that time that I was lame. I've got over feeling as if I could trust people. Dilly Gage might not cheat in weighing rags, like her father; but when it came to helping her father to get a great lot of money out of the railroad—well, I rather guess that was like the musk-rat's nest that floored Tommy Taylor."

Phonse delivered himself of his cynical opinions with such an air of wisdom that Cherry was crushed if not convinced.

"What shall we do about it, Phonse? Have we got to tell? It doesn't make any difference that he is pretending, since he lost the case, anyway," she said.

"I rather think Uncle David would feel better to know that it was so. And I wish you would say *they* are pretending, and not throw it all onto old Preserved. I shouldn't wonder a bit if that girl put him up to it."

"Uncle David doesn't seem to care at all," said Cherry, meditatively.

"I think you ought to know by this time that only girls go howling around about how they feel. It's likely that Uncle David would let you know!"

"I can always tell," said Cherry, nodding her head wisely. "When things have gone very wrong he never eats any dessert, and every day lately he has had two helps of pudding; and he hasn't called me Charity, not even when I've been in scrapes."

"I really believe you want to keep that girl from being found out," cried Phonse, in a tone of great indignation. "If you call that being square—"

"No, I don't," said Cherry; it's only that I can't believe Dilly is to blame—that she knows. I suppose I'm silly."

"Of course you are," said Phonse, with his accustomed candor.

"It's so horrid to find people out, and tell of them—by accident, like this."

"Would it have been better if we had tried to find them out? Now, you know you are talking nonsense, Cherry. What about the doctor, who is being cheated out of his time and his medicine? Of course it's our duty to expose fraud wherever we find it. If we didn't,

we should be what they call accessaries." (Phonse had been acquiring legal knowledge, stimulated by his experience in court, and was fond of using it to make an impression upon the girls. It was unsatisfactory to try to impress Ben and Simmy Backup in that way, as their frankness of manner permitted them to be critical and even openly derisive.) "I should think it would make some difference to you that half the people in the county think those Gages were wronged, and that we are to blame," continued Phonse, as Cherry still looked doubtful.

"I suppose we must tell Uncle David, of course," said Cherry; "but I am trying to think whether it could be possible that Dilly has been deceived."

"Of course she hasn't. I don't see how you can imagine such a thing. There is no doubt whatever that she was an accessary before the fact."

This miss-sounding legal phrase seemed to Cherry to make Dilly's wickedness more dreadful. It seemed almost as if one might be executed for doing anything that sounded like that. But she comforted herself a little by thinking of what Philander had said when she told him of some of the mysterious expressions she had heard in court.

"Them lawyers they have to talk consid'able hi-falutin," said he, "because if they talked so common folks could understand 'em, why, then, common folks would find out that what they said wa'n't of much account. If you hain't got but dreadful little to say, there ain't nothin' like usin' big words to say it in. Puts me in mind of the cap'n's wife that we picked up when the *Victory* was shipwrecked; she was always boastin' of the furrin languages she knew, and talkin' so much like a dictionary that you couldn't understand hardly a word she said. One day I couldn't seem to

stand it no longer, and I up and says to her, 'It's a terrible pity you're so lackin' that you can't make folks understand you without takin' the trouble to use such big words. But, then, some is gifted and some ain't,' says I. 'Why, I knew a man once of such a powerful intelleck that he could express hisself in words of one syllable!' She drew in her horns, I can tell you."

It was consoling to recall Philander's opinion that legal phrases and large words in general seldom meant much; nevertheless, something still remained of the shock which it had caused her to hear that Dilly was an "accessary before the fact."

"I think she is probably worse than that," said Phonse, who had been pondering deeply—"an accomplice!" He said it with awful emphasis, but it did not strike Cherry so forcibly as his first phrase had done; it was more familiar, and less associated with courts.

"Don't you think her father may have made her help him, Phonse?" said Cherry, who was meditatively flicking flies off the pony with her riding-whip.

Phonse's answer, which Cherry well knew would be unsatisfactory, was interrupted by the noise of wheels, mingled with the clattering of tin-ware on the rickety little bridge that crossed Roaring Brook.

"It's Dilly!" cried Cherry. "What can have sent her home at this time of day? What a queer old lame horse she has! Oh, Phonse, I dread to see her now. I think I ought to give her the horse just the same; what happened to old Jane was really my fault."

"No, it wasn't, either," said Phonse, stoutly. "Now, would you ever have thought of coming down here if they hadn't got up their plot to cheat? Of course you wouldn't."

"Oh, what *shall* we say to her?" cried Cherry, desperately.

CHAPTER XII.

Cherry felt a strong impulse to run away from Dilly Gage, but she restrained it, not only because she felt it to be ignoble, but because it was quite evident that Phonse meant to stand his ground, and she could by no means endure the scorn which he would heap upon her if she should desert him. Moreover, she had not quite decided what to do about the horse; she had not found Phonse's argument altogether convincing. And that little doubt whether Dilly had shared in her father's deception—it was more like an unreasoning hope which she could not forego—also served to hold her fast, while the lame old horse and the jingling wagon came slowly along over the muddy road.

As for Phonse, all his dread of Dilly Gage had vanished in the light of his discovery. She might make faces now without disturbing him in the least. It was a greater relief than he would have acknowledged to be free from the feeling that he might have helped to keep them from their rights. He did not need Cherry to tell him that he had not been "square"—that expressive boy's word for honest—in withholding the fact that Chissy Fenwick had said what he was supposed to have said; his conscience still refused to be satisfied on that score; but it was consoling to know that the Gages' poverty was not owing to that. Then, too, Phonse had the sort of nature—not very noble, I am afraid, but, alas! not at all uncommon—that likes to blame some one for its sufferings. There was a certain satisfaction in feeling that he had a right to be

thoroughly angry with Dilly Gage. When Cherry said, "I'm afraid she'll know by the way we act that we've found out something," he answered, with decision: "I mean she shall. Perhaps you're going to inquire after her father's health, and say you're sorry; but I'm not a girl, and I don't pretend, and I haven't forgotten what I've been through, all on account of their humbugging."

Perhaps it was not to be expected that Phonse should feel any disposition to spare Dilly. Cherry, who had understood and sympathized with him more than any one else, could scarcely find it in her heart to blame him, although she did wish that he wouldn't feel so sure that Dilly was an "accomplice" or an "accessary." And yet it did seem probable that he was right about that.

"Uncle David has always thought that Preserved Gage was making believe, and yet he let me buy the horse; he helped me to buy him," she said, suddenly brightening.

"Oh, who cares about your old horse!" said Phonse, impatiently. "Give her the horse if you want to. All I want is to let her understand that I know what tricks she's up to."

Dilly had by this time driven up into her own door-yard with as great an air of importance as the infirmities of her steed would permit, and without bestowing a glance upon Cherry and Phonse, although it was quite impossible that she should not have known that they were there. She backed her equipage into the tumble-down little shed, and as, in the place where she sat upon her wagon, Phonse and Cherry were directly in front of her, she ostentatiously shut her eyes.

Phonse laughed contemptuously—a little laugh, but intended to reach Dilly's ears.

"Don't, Phonse," said Cherry, softly. "That isn't half so bad as making faces. I think Dilly improves."

This was not the way to keep Phonse from laughing. He laughed with genuine mirth now. Cherry was really funny, he thought, in her determination to make something of that girl. She could trace progress in the fact that she shut her eyes tightly at people of whom she didn't approve, instead of making faces at them. Cherry really seemed to have a sort of fancy that she could civilize that girl, and she didn't seem to feel as shocked as she ought to feel at the dreadful fraud she had been practising. It began to look as if Cherry had not a proper sense of "squareness." Phonse wondered vaguely if she had not been, after all, as much to blame about the arithmetic lessons as he. Certainly she had begun it. Perhaps he had given her more than her due that day in court. When a fellow got into such a lofty mood as that he was apt to overdo the matter of generosity. But then he liked Cherry; she wasn't so silly as most girls, and didn't think she knew everything, and she looked so frank and honest. Perhaps, however, that was because of her turn-up nose.

"I wish you'd go away, and not stand there cacklin' like a goose," called Dilly from the wagon. She was finding it a very unsatisfactory revenge to shut one's eyes at people, and was gradually giving way to her impulse to return to more warlike methods. "I don't see what you're hangin' round down here for, anyhow. Spyin' round, I expect. It's lucky you've come horseback, for I couldn't carry you home. I hired this poor old cretur of Jed Trefry, and give him seventy-five cents; he wouldn't let me have him without I paid in advance. I calc'lated I could make it pay, because I had a lot of rags to carry to the mills, and rags has



"'DILLY, WE BOUGHT THIS HORSE FOR YOU. HE'S GOOD AND STRONG.'"

riz, and I've got consid'able many customers down the mills way, too, and I'd promised old Mis' Risley I'd fetch her a dredgin'-box, solum true. This old horse begun to grow lame before I'd got to the corner, but I kept on thinkin' mebbe he'd get limbered out, and it didn't 'pear to hurt him much. And then I found out one of his shoes was 'most off. I kept a-hammerin' away at it with a stone, but 'twa'n't no use. Then come to find out he hadn't any shoe at all on his nigh hind-foot. Jed Trefry's a cheat, and I ain't sharp enough. He's got to get a piece of my mind, though. Some boys hollered out, 'Go it, Barebones!' and some other sarse, but I never took a mite of notice. I just pretended I didn't hear; that's the best way."

Cherry looked up quickly, with pleasure shining in her eyes. When she had given that advice to Dilly she had by no means expected that it would be taken.

"I never done it because you told me to," said Dilly, with quick recollection. "I've found out that you've got to put up with a sight if you're goin' to do any business, that's all. What are you doin' down here, anyway? I wisht you'd just go home."

Dilly was apt to forget her anger in her naturally strong desire for sympathy whenever she met Cherry, but it flamed out at intervals.

"Dilly, I—I—felt so badly about old Jane, and Uncle David and I—he helped me—we bought this horse for you. He's good and strong."

Dilly had advanced as far as her own door-stone during her flow of words, and she stood there now staring at Cherry and the horse, transfixed with astonishment.

"I ain't goin' to take any horse from *him*," she said, her face darkening slowly. "We don't want any givin's from him, father 'n' I don't, nor anything but just

our rights that he's cheated us out of. If 'twas you alone that give it to me, Cherry Eastman—but then you wouldn't have no call to. I needn't have carried you home that night without I'd been a mind to. I don't know what you was down here for. If it was to spy round—and there is folks that comes here for that, and I know it—you couldn't see any more than poor father layin' there sufferin'."

"Lying there suffering!" echoed Phonse, in shrill contempt. "He is down cellar eating baked beans. I wasn't spying round, but I saw him."

"It's no such thing!" cried Dilly, her face in a flame. "You never saw such a sight, for he can't move nor stir. Somebody's told you that—there's folks that says things—and you darst to come here and say it to my face! You come in here, you come right straight in here, both of you, and see him."

Phonse unhesitatingly followed Dilly's imperious beckoning, but Cherry drew back until Dilly seized her by the arm.

"You come, too," she said, almost roughly, and yet with an accent of entreaty. "I can't put up with it to have *you* thinkin' such things, and I ain't goin' to."

There was such a ring of truth in Dilly's voice that Cherry's faith in her grew almost to a certainty, and Phonse looked at her in perplexity.

"I *saw* him, you know," he murmured, but it was under his breath, and Dilly's attention was so centred upon Cherry that she did not hear. They stood just inside the door of the living-room, a bare and meagre little place, but shiningly clean, and with a pathetic attempt at adornment in the skimpy, much-washed bit of muslin which did duty as a curtain at the one window, in a gaudy print in a frame of pine cones, and a motto, "Home sweet home," done in pink worsted on perfo-

rated card-board, for which Dilly, after many midnight vigils of desire and doubt, had given Cally Bumpus a tin teapot, a small broom, and a feather-duster. "Seems as if 'twould kind of chipper me up to have a motto like folks," she had said, apologetically, to old Mrs. Fickett, who had thought her extravagant. "Folks think I hadn't ought to want anything fashionable, but I guess I've got feelin's. And if rags keep on as brisk as they be now, I'm goin' to have a sash, and a feather that ain't Cally Bumpus's."

But Dilly had no pride in her possessions to-day. She did not even observe whether her visitors looked at the motto. Her whole soul seemed absorbed in a burning sense of wrong.

"Oh, I don't want to see him. I don't want to, Dilly," Cherry insisted, drawing back from the threshold of the bedroom door.

But Dilly's grasp upon her arm was firm. "Then you hadn't ought to let him tell such orfle stories," said Dilly, indicating Phonse by a fierce gesture. "'Tain't any more 'n might be expected from him, but I wouldn't have thought you'd act just as if you b'lieved it! You've got to see him, anyhow, and if he ain't very polite to you, why, 'tain't any more 'n you ought to expect. Roarin' Brook folks is plain folks, that speaks their minds, and it ain't apt to make any folks mealy-mouthed to be sot on. He don't like to have folks fetched into his room, neither, but I'm bound that folks that b'lieves such lies shall see him."

She flung open the bedroom door. "Father, I've brought—"

She stopped short at sight of the empty bed, and turned a pale and startled face towards Cherry.

"He couldn't get up! 'Lando Bumpus had to come and lift him this morning. Somebody must have took

him away. Father! father!" she cried, in a kind of bewildered despair, of which it was impossible to doubt the reality.

"He's down cellar. I saw him, you know," said Phonse, with unpitying calmness.

At that moment a door opened cautiously for the space of an inch or two; the old man's grizzly head was visible for an instant above the cellar stairs, and then the door closed with a jerk.

"I never knew it! I never knew it!" cried Dilly. "You may b'lieve it or not, just as you're a mind to. I knew folks said so. They said he played ghost and frightened folks. One time I thought I saw him, over acrost the bridge, on the edge of the woods. I'd got kind of belated, 'twas 'most dark, and I was hurryin' because 'twas the time Cally Bumpus had gone visitin' to her sister's, and there wa'n't nobody to give him his medicine. 'Twas a man all wrapped up in a sheet—'peared to be—and his head looked like father's. But when I come home there he was abed, and the sheets didn't look as if they'd been meddled with. Beats all how quick he must have come, if 'twas him. And he must have come acrost the brook, on the steppin'-stones, if 'twas him. I can't b'lieve 'twas, now. I wisht I'd chased him and found out; that's why I did that night you and I see something. I've watched and watched, but I be a sound sleeper nights. Seems as if I couldn't keep awake, I get so tired, and the doctor said there wa'n't no need to give him his medicine nights. Oh, land sakes! he's my father! Sometimes he's been good to me, too. I couldn't b'lieve it, nor I can't. He's took on so because I had to go round with the wagon, and he didn't know what was goin' to become of us. I don't see how he could have made b'lieve and me not know it. He wa'n't hurt at all, do



"AT THAT MOMENT A DOOR OPENED CAUTIOUSLY FOR THE SPACE OF AN INCH OR TWO."

you s'pose? And he ain't blind? My head's kind of whirlin' round. I wisht you'd go home; I wisht you would!"

"We're going now, right away. We don't want to trouble you. I wish you'd believe it, Dilly. Dilly, I'm so sorry for you! I'm sure you didn't know. I didn't feel all the time as if you could make believe. I always believed in you. You'll keep the horse from me, won't you?"

But Dilly made no response. She went to the cellar door and stood with her back against it, as if on guard.

"He's my father," she said; as if that were a sufficient answer to everything that could be said. And Cherry felt that the kindest thing which she and Phonse could do for Dilly was to go away.

In fact, Phonse was already out of the house. He didn't believe in Dilly, he said to himself, but to see anybody *pretend* to feel so badly as that was enough to make a fellow miserable. He had a vague fear that he should end in believing in her if he stayed. And Cherry would keep talking; being a girl, perhaps she really couldn't help it; and it was evidently difficult for her to keep her voice steady. She would probably cry soon if she kept on. Then there would be a scene, and that girl, who was so much more than a match for Cherry, would take advantage of it to *pretend* harder than ever. After they had cried together, nobody could convince Cherry that she *wasn't* a martyr.

Cherry left the horse fastened to a tree. He was as submissive and mild-mannered now as a horse need be, and looked after them with a neigh that sounded like friendly regret.

"He isn't fit for a saddle-horse, of course, but he's too good to draw a tin-peddler's wagon—for a girl, too," said Phonse. "I wonder if she'll go on doing it,

now they've been found out? I don't see how the old man can have the face to, or the girl either."

Cherry made no answer. They had had a heated argument about leaving the horse, and Cherry was anxious not to reopen it. Phonse refused to believe in Dilly. He said she was only acting; that her father could not possibly have carried out the deception without her help.

"You'll see what other people will say—grown people," he said. "I don't suppose you think you know more than the whole town."

"If the whole county should think that Dilly had helped her father to deceive, I should know she hadn't," said Cherry, firmly.

"You call *thinking knowing*, and you think so because you want to think so. That's just like girls," said Phonse, scornfully. "She did act pretty well, I'll say that for her. But of course he wouldn't have taken the trouble to deceive her; he'd know that she wouldn't tell of him."

"He might know that she was different from him altogether, and wouldn't help him," said Cherry.

She made the pony go so fast that Phonse on foot found it difficult to keep up with him. Phonse was always pertinacious at an argument, and Cherry was tired of it; and she wanted an opportunity to think, quietly, how she could help Dilly in the troublous times that were before her. She had never thought of helping any one but Phonse before, in her life, unless it might have been to beat eggs, or seed raisins, or run of errands for Loveday in domestic emergencies. To do everything she could do for Phonse, with a feeling that grandma was watching to see how she kept her promise, to keep out of scrapes and "get along" with Rhoda, and not to miss any possible good times—these

efforts had hitherto made up the sum and substance of Cherry's life. She had pitied herself ever since she could remember as having a great many troubles. It was a new idea that there were people who had more whom she might help. It was astonishing how one's own troubles dwindled in this new view of things. Cherry was reminded of one of Philander's stories of an island which was surrounded by such a peculiar atmosphere that its shore looked like a rocky rampart, and its inhabitants such huge giants that no one dared go near them, while when one had landed one found only a little pebbly beach, and little good-natured gnomes and pygmies were the islanders. To them every coming ship looked a huge mountain that was going to crush them. And this queer state of things was the result of nothing in the world but the vapor from their own broth, and they were forced to send for the good giant Knoopen-Puffin to cool their broth and blow the vapor all away.

"I really believe that Knoopen-Puffin has cooled my broth," said Cherry to herself. "And I will help Dilly if I can. I hope Uncle David will think I did right about the horse, but I don't know."

Phonse kept up with the pony in a determined manner; he also kept on with his arguments to convince Cherry that Dilly Gage was an "accessary."

"Now, you don't suppose that that girl didn't know it was her father dressed up to frighten people that you met in the road that night? If she hadn't known she wouldn't have followed him, you may be sure. I thought then that it was very queer for a girl to be so brave."

"It wasn't, Phonse; it wasn't a man. If you could have seen it—"

"I used to think you had some sense," said Phonse,

severely. "See there! if here isn't Ben getting over the fence. Ben, Ben!" (Phonse was in a great hurry, for he was afraid that Cherry meant to try to persuade him not to tell of his discovery; there was no telling to what lengths Cherry might go in her sympathy with Dilly Gage.) "I say, Ben, we've found the ghost."

"You've found the ghost!" echoed Ben, staring at him in a perplexity which was not without a little touch of indignation. "You've *found* the ghost? Why, we've *got him!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

As Ben made this astonishing announcement he advanced into the road, and following him in a perfectly docile and submissive way was a huge bear. In the bear's wake appeared Simmy Backup with a radiant countenance.

Cherry cried out, and the pony trembled and pranced so that it was difficult to quiet him.

"Don't you see that he's tame, you goosie?" cried Ben to Cherry. "He's like a lamb. And he's educated, too; he's a performing bear. He can beat Garibaldi all hollow, can't he, Simmy?"

"Well, I don't think he's any more—more intellectual, naturally," said Garibaldi's master, loyally. "He must have been in a show, you see. If Garibaldi had had his advantages—"

"You ought to see him stand on his hind-legs!" exclaimed Ben, enthusiastically. The bear took this for a command, or else was in the habit of displaying this accomplishment when strangers appeared, for he immediately raised his ponderous body to an upright



"THE BEAR IMMEDIATELY RAISED HIS PONDEROUS BODY TO AN UPRIGHT POSITION AND SHOOK HIS GREAT PAWS, LIKE A DOG THAT BEGS FOR HIS DINNER."

position and shook his great paws, like a dog that begs for his dinner.

"It was he that we saw that night, Dilly and I!" cried Cherry. "He was waving his paws just like that!"

"Of course it was. Didn't I tell you that we had got the ghost?" said Ben. "Think of such a lot of people being frightened at a poor old tame bear! He must have come through the woods all the way from Belford; the show has been round there for two or three weeks. I think, and so does Simmy, that it's the same bear that was here with that show last summer. And see! he sort of pricks up his ears when we call him Cap'n Jack."

In fact the bear took a few dancing steps, and wagged his paws joyfully, at sound of the name.

"He's *some*, I can tell you!" said Ben, with emphasis. "Why, it was from him that we got our ideas of educating Garibaldi. A ghost! that's just about the way ghosts always turn out when you're not frightened, but just hunt them up."

"I never thought of being afraid of ghosts," said Simmy, stoutly. "I knew there were no such things."

"I don't see how anybody could call Cap'n Jack white," pursued Ben, "although he is rather light-colored for a bear. Didn't we have a great time getting him, though! If it hadn't been for Simmy he'd have been dead now, poor old fellow! and shouldn't I have felt like a murderer when I found out who he was. He was behind a tree when I caught sight of him, near the logging camp; he was on top of the camp last night; Simmy saw him. He — he didn't say much about it." (Ben had become suddenly alive to the necessity of concealing Simmy's weakness.) "Fancy his climbing the ladder just like a person! We made him do it this morning, to see if he really could. Well,

where was I? Oh, I fired at him. I expected he'd spring at us the next minute—a bear, you know. Of course I ought to have stopped to think that he was probably tame, but I didn't. I was thinking of orfle bear-fights I'd read of, and of that bear Philander knows about that killed nineteen armed men and ground their bones all to meal. A fellow may not exactly swallow that, you know, but when he comes right upon his first bear, scarcely three feet off, and a big one—well, a story like that does occur to him, you know. If it hadn't been for Simmy— Simmy saw the collar round Cap'n Jack's neck, and the broken rope, and he knocked the rifle up. It isn't every fellow that would have been so quick; some fellows would have been afraid."

"I'd be ashamed to be afraid of a bear," said Simmy, flushed with honest pride.

"Philander was scared 'most to death. He had come after us because he thought the rifle wasn't loaded. Fancy my not being up to Philander's tricks! I never take it until I've satisfied myself that he hasn't been tampering with it. He generally has. It isn't a thing I'd say everywhere, of course, but just among ourselves—Philander is an orfle coward! For a fellow who has shot such a lot of dragons and things, he's uncommonly afraid of a gun. He heard the rifle go off just before he got to us, and the next minute he saw the bear. He was as pale as could be. 'She's an orfle hand to kick, that rifle is,' he said. 'You'd better drop her. And you jest come off and leave the cretur, if so be he'll let ye.' And after I told him he was tame, and poor old Cap'n Jack had stood up and begged at him, he kept saying, 'He's a terrible big bear, boys, a *terrible* big one.' You needn't tell me that Philander wasn't *afraid of that bear.*"

"In the daytime, too, you know," said Simmy Back-up, with a very superior air. "It's a pity to be such a 'fraid-cat."

"He went back 'across lots'; he said he was in a hurry to finish hoeing his beans; but I think he didn't want to go home with the bear," said Ben, with a scornful accent.

"I think you'd better go along, if you don't mind. Tam doesn't like him very well," said Cherry.

"*Tam* doesn't like him!" echoed Ben. "Oho! you think I don't know you're just trying to *bear* up. Well, you've done pretty well for a girl who isn't much acquainted with bears. And the Cap'n is pretty big, and not so very handsome, but he's a good fellow; aren't you, Cap'n?"

The bear responded to this compliment and the pat which Ben gave him by getting up on his hind-legs again, and offering cordially to shake hands.

"If you could just get him off to one side of the road, so Tam would go by him," said Cherry, in rather faint accents.

"I think his collar is too tight, and he looks hollow; he must be hungry," said Phonse, anxiously.

"Of course a common bear could get his living in the woods," said Ben, "but it's different for him, with his education. We don't know what he'll eat, but we're going to try him with everything. Hurry, will you, Phonse? Loveday will let you have pound-cake and preserves for him."

"It's a shame to take a creature like that out of his native woods and make a show of him," said Phonse, hotly. "I've no doubt they tortured him teaching him to perform those foolish antics."

"I should like to know if it isn't better for him to be an ornament to society than a poor, hunted—"

"Oh, Ben, do get him up onto the bank and let me go by," interrupted Cherry, knowing by previous experience that the argument for and against the education of the lower animals was likely to be interminable.

"I shouldn't expect a girl to appreciate a bear, but I should think you might see that the poor old fellow is harmless," grumbled Ben. But he led Captain Jack up to the fence, leaving all the space possible for the accommodation of Cherry and her pony; and they went on at a lively pace, Tam evidently as much relieved as his mistress to leave the bear behind. Cherry was not very timid usually, but she was impressed, as Philander had been, with the remarkable size of the bear. If his natural ferocity should break out, it seemed to Cherry that he might be quite capable of devouring as many men and muskets as Philander's fabled bear.

As Tam turned into the highway her attention was attracted by a man who was pasting posters upon a fence. He got into his wagon and drove rapidly off towards the village before she overtook him. She stopped to read the first poster:

"Strayed or stolen from the Great Moral and Intellectual Show at Belford, lower village, July 7th, the celebrated performing bear Captain Jack. A liberal reward will be paid for his return to the subscriber at Belford. J. P. LANDIS,

"Proprietor G. M. and I. Show."

A little farther on, Philander, with his hoe over his shoulder, was stopping to read one of the posters.

"Well, I snum, if them boys wa'n't acquainted with that bear! Never see him but jest once, neither, and that was more'n a year ago. He's a consid'able good-sized bear, now, ain't he? Not but what I've seen 'em bigger, but he is fair to middlin'—he is, for certain. I don't say them boys is foolhardy; he appears as if

butter wouldn't melt in his mouth; but 'tain't in my nater to put confidence in a bear, and I ain't sorry that the owner's found, and they've got to carry him home, for 'twould be consid'able like a couple of boys to want to keep him. Well, now, you see what fools folks can make of themselves about ap*pear*itions! Them Roarin' Brook folks got up a ghost seven feet high, and all in white, out of a poor old tame bear."

Cherry chirruped to Tam. She certainly was not called upon to explain to Philander that it was probably another "appearition" and not the bear which had frightened the Roaring Brook people. She met Uncle David just driving out of the lane. He looked in evident surprise at Cherry's disturbed and downcast face.

"Well, didn't the young female tin-peddler accept the horse graciously?" he asked, in a very jocose way for Uncle David.

"She—she said she didn't want to take him, but I left him. I think she will."

"I think she will, too," said Uncle David, with an accent which seemed to imply a very low opinion of Dilly Gage. He drove on, and although Phonse's discovery was on the very tip of Cherry's tongue, it did not come out. Uncle David would be so sure to think Dilly an "accessary." And there was no need for her to be in haste; Phonse would take that matter out of her hands.

Rhoda was sitting on the porch, under the shadow of the hop-vine, with a bit of fleecy-white crochet-work, which, under her nimble fingers, was rapidly developing into a dainty hood.

"You haven't even begun a thing for the fair yet, have you?" she said, with an accusing accent. "I've been saving up so carefully that I have almost seven

dollars to spend for it. I didn't feel like asking papa for any money, now that he has been losing so much."

That meant the horse! and Cherry thought Rhoda might have spared her, since she already felt so unhappy about it; but Rhoda had a theory that Cherry lacked "a realizing sense"—a favorite expression of Loveday's—and that it was her duty to help her to acquire one. Rhoda had no feeling that her father's money belonged less to Cherry than to herself; if she had been her sister she would have uttered her little reflections in just the same way; but to Cherry the consciousness that she was an alien gave them a deeper sting.

"I don't care about the fair. I don't care about the old Village Improvement Society, anyway. It is as much as I can do to improve myself," she said, crossly, switching the hop-vine with her riding-whip until a shower of leaves fell into Rhoda's lap.

Rhoda brushed them away placidly.

"If you are really trying to improve yourself, Cherry, I'm sure I'm glad, but I can't say I think it looks much like it to be so cross. I should suppose you might be satisfied since you have had your own way about giving that girl a horse. I think myself that it was a very ridiculous thing, when we don't know that she isn't a dreadful impostor. If she isn't, why, then, we ought to find it out. I'm so anxious to hear whether Chissy Fenwick remembers anything about that day! It's much better to be just to people than to give them presents." (There was no doubt that Rhoda, in her moral reflections, did sometimes, as Ben said, "hit the nail on the head.")

"This had nothing to do with her being an impostor or not," said Cherry, hotly; "and it wasn't a present. I owed it to her because it was on my account that her old horse was killed."

"I advised papa not to let you do it, but he doesn't listen to me at all lately. Ever since that day in court he seems to think that you and Phonse know everything, but I think there is something very queer about the way you act. You seem to have some secret. It wasn't a bit like Phonse to go down to the Gages with you. I can't think what made him do it."

It was evident that Rhoda was at her old occupation of "putting two and two together." Cherry found that saying the alphabet backward—Loveday's recipe for a ruffled temper—was likely to prove ineffectual, and ran off up-stairs to her room.

She was sitting by the window, still brooding over her troubles, when Rhoda put her head in at the door.

"I think you might have told me that the ghost was a bear, and the boys had him," she said, in an aggrieved tone. "Isn't he wonderful? He bowed to me, and wanted to shake hands. I couldn't do that, but I like to see him; he isn't like that horrid pig. They've got him on the barn floor, and nine boys have come already; no one knows how they heard of him; and Phonse is going to make his collar larger, for fear he isn't comfortable, and he is feeding him with cookies and honey; he has always heard, he says, that bears like honey; and Philander has gone to get his fiddle, because they think the bear can dance, and you'd really better come down."

Cherry understood perfectly, in spite of the injured tone, that this was an overture to a reconciliation. It was she who made them, after their little differences, more often than Rhoda. She thought Rhoda must have enjoyed the bear very much to have become so good-natured. But perhaps the truth was that Rhoda's good angel suddenly reminded her of something that Ben had once said, and which she had resented as untrue at

the time. Certain it is that the only listener, a great brown bee in the hop-vine, heard her say:

"I don't mean to say hateful things to Cherry, but she is very trying." And the bee buzzed his opinion so loudly that it sounded like scolding. "Perhaps I do say hateful things to Cherry," she admitted.

And that was before the bear and the boys came into sight. So it will be seen that Cherry gave Rhoda less credit than she deserved. But Cherry went with great alacrity to see the bear dance. In her heart she thought him less fascinating than the pig, because one had always heard and read of performing bears, but an accomplished pig was rare.

The barn was rapidly filling with boys of all ages and complexions. Ben and Simmy Backup were making strenuous efforts to keep them from crowding around the bear, to the great hinderance of his performances. Captain Jack was evidently enjoying his social success, and was offering unlimited hand-shaking to the crowd.

Simmy Backup was walking about, assuring every one, with something of a superior air, that there was not the least occasion for being afraid of the bear, and hearing, with intense satisfaction, Ben's story, related over and over, of his prowess in striking up the rifle, so that it's ball went harmlessly into the air. Ben knew how to appreciate a fellow's bravery, and wasn't a bit envious of it; and Simmy's consciousness of having acquitted himself well at the last made him almost forget those humiliating moments when he had been forced to acknowledge to himself that he was afraid. It was even more consoling than Philander's oft-repeated assertion that "'twa'n't nothin' but fools that wa'n't afraid when there was something to be afraid of." Even Philander would be scornful if he knew that he (Simmy) was afraid—oh, deep disgrace—of the dark!

Little Caleb Backup, with two other small boys and a very small girl (the granddaughter of old Mrs. Sally Pitkin, who lived "across the field," who had wandered from home in a hasty toilet, consisting of a yellow flannel night-gown and one shoe) had taken refuge, in a state of mingled delight and alarm, upon the ladder, where immediate flight to the hay-loft was easy.

The hens and ducks and geese and turkeys that were constantly wandering through the great barn, from door to door, had all fled, clucking and quacking and hissing—all except one belated bantam, which surveyed the proceedings from the hay-loft, cocking its head and cackling, with a mixture of astonishment and alarm, and the ill-tempered gobbler that paraded the outskirts of the crowd, gobbling himself purple. The spotted calf, after one glimpse at the invader, had kicked up his heels and made a bee-line for the meadow, where he might find safety with his mother and the other matrons of the herd; and Sultan, the old house-dog, was barking so madly that he had to be ignominiously thrust into the granary and locked up. Only Corny Buttercup, the yellow kitten, valiantly faced the foe, her back elevated to a bristling ridge, and her tail as large as all the rest of her small person; and how the audience shouted when Captain Jack playfully pretended to cuff her with his huge paw!

"We might bring Garibaldi in, too," suggested Simmy, in an aside to Ben. "It would be a sort of first appearance for him, and get him used to a crowd."

Ben looked at the bear, at Philander, who was tuning his fiddle, and then at the throng of boys, with a speculative eye.

"We've got the material here for a great show, Simmy!" he said, impressively.

"And we're just about wasting it!" Simmy replied.

"There are only a few of the boys here who can really appreciate that bear, or Garibaldi, either," continued Ben.

"And they're not going to pay a cent," said Simmy, with much feeling. Simmy had a keen eye to business.

"If we could only have that bear for an evening performance, and have a little time to get ready."

"And charge," added Simmy.

"Perhaps ten cents or so," assented Ben, who usually thought very little of his pocket. "It would be a great advertisement for Garibaldi, to say nothing of the experience he would get. But of course we must take the bear home at once. It wouldn't be the square thing to keep him."

"Perhaps the man will let you, Ben," suggested Cherry, who had overheard. "The man who put up the posters, I mean. I saw him. He was driving towards the village. You might possibly find him there now."

"Probably he is only a bill-poster, and hasn't any authority," said Ben.

"But there's a chance," cried Simmy, eagerly.

"Yes, there is, and we won't lose it," said Ben. "Wait a moment, Philander. Ladies and gentlemen!" Ben had mounted a barrel, and he made a bow to the spectators—as polite a bow as if they had paid, which Simmy thought a mistake. Captain Jack, when he saw it, bowed also, turning from side to side with professional ease and grace. "Ladies and gentlemen," repeated Ben, when a murmur of applause had subsided, "this great — great — astonishing show, and— and uniquest bear in the world, will be postponed." (Ben was not used to public speaking, and was somewhat confused by trying to remember the impressively large words he had seen in advertisements.) "Maybe

he—it—they—won't come off at all. It doesn't belong to us—the bear, I mean. But at any rate the talented Performing Pig, the greatest marvel of the age, owned and educated by Simeon Backup, Esq., with a little assistance from me" (Ben was capable of modesty and self-sacrifice, but he felt that it was carrying things too far not to claim such an honor as that when it rightfully belonged to one) "will make his first public appearance on any stage in this barn (which is bigger than his native barn) at an early date, of which due notice will be given. Maybe Captain Jack will appear too. Anyway, we'll let you know."

There was a murmur of dissatisfaction, which gradually rose to a shout of angry remonstrance, as Ben jumped down from the barrel, and Philander stood with his bow in the air and his mouth wide open with astonishment.

"Well, the idees of boys is like greased lightnin'! There ain't no follerin' 'em. But 'tain't fittin', nohow, that a man of my parts should be fiddlin' for a dancin' bear."

Philander's tone made it possible to suspect that he, like the crowd of boys, was disappointed.

"But you will play, won't you, Philander, when we have the great performance?" said Simmy.

"I don't know what you're a-talkin' about. You can't keep that bear. Your pas won't countenance no such doin's," said Philander.

"Of course we wouldn't do it unless the owner gave us leave," said Ben, indignantly. "But I'll tell you what I've thought of. It said on the posters that a reward would be paid for the return of the bear. Now, of course, we don't want to take a reward for a little thing like that, which was only fun to us, do we, Simmy?"

"No-o," said Simmy, somewhat faintly, for had he not already reckoned that his share might be as much as five dollars; that he could replace the thirty-nine cents of his missionary money which he had spent for candy (Simmy was possessed of a sweet tooth, which was only a little smaller trial than his timidity), and about which his conscience was pressing him sorely; and had he not, even while that most fascinating bear was displaying his accomplishments, spent, in fancy, more than a hundred dollars in trying to make the remaining four dollars and sixty-one cents cover his pressing needs in the way of bicycles, base-ball bats, watches, guns, and traps? Nevertheless, he repeated the "no" firmly, being fully convinced that whatever Ben said or did was right.

"But we might tell the man that, instead of giving us a reward, he might let us keep the bear overnight and exhibit him. It wouldn't hurt the show any when it comes; every one would go just the same, and more. And so we could make a really great event of Garibaldi's first appearance."

"It would be an immense thing for Garibaldi. And if we only charged ten cents we should get an orfle lot of money," said Simmy, eagerly.

"I suppose we should have to charge," said Ben, "because the barn wouldn't hold the crowd that would come if we didn't. Come on! If we don't hurry, there's no chance of our overtaking the man."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE crowd in the barn dispersed reluctantly, and not until Philander had withdrawn the bear into the seclusion of the carriage-house.

The general indignation was somewhat soothed by the prospect of "a real show," at which not only the bear would appear, but also the talented pig, who had been carefully secluded from the gaze of all but a very few boys, and skilfully "managed" by the business-like Simmy. Dicky Wardwell and some other boys, who were always "short," declared that they would not pay their money to see Simmy Backup's "old pig," which, after all, was only a pig like innumerable Byerly pigs which one might look at all day for nothing, and strong doubts were cast upon his talents. But, in spite of these views, the impecunious were evidently much cheered by the suggestion of Tommy Nutter that free tickets could probably be obtained of Ben, who was well known to be the most generous boy in Byerly.

The small yellow-night-gowned person wandered homeward, roaring as lustily as is possible with one's thumb in one's mouth, and leaving her one shoe in the middle of the barn floor, where it had caught upon a nail; and Parker Fenwick, aged four, violently hurled green apples at the carriage-house as an expression of his feelings.

"It's too bad to disappoint them so," said Cherry, sympathetically. "Here, Parker Fenwick, here are

some early sweetings for you. You won't care to throw those to frighten the poor bear, will you?"

"Parker Fenwick, you are a very bad boy, and I shall tell your aunt," said Rhoda, severely. "Cherry, I think it is very wrong of you to encourage him."

"I couldn't help pitying him, he was so small and so mad," said Cherry, apologetically. "I know how horridly it feels to be so mad as that."

"It is wrong to be angry, and people should not be rewarded for it," said Rhoda. "And I wish you would stop saying *mad;* it sounds so common."

"I will if you'll stop blaming me. You're always blaming me for something, Rhoda. And you say things are *real nice;* Phonse says you do. That's worse than mad. Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't said that! I wonder if we *couldn't* manage to be together for five minutes without quarrelling."

"I'm sure I never quarrel," said Rhoda; "but I must say I think you're very trying, Cherry, and I wonder sometimes how I do get along with you. I was trying to be just as nice as I could be to you, and I went up after you to come and see the bear—"

"So you did, Rhoda. I believe I am a horrid old thing. Phonse said the other day, when he was mad—angry, I mean—with me, that I was like the knight in the conundrum, 'all fit for a fight.' Let's make caramels this afternoon, will you, Rhoda?"

"If it isn't too warm," Rhoda assented, graciously.

But it was much too warm; and, moreover, Ben and Simmy Backup returned from the village in such high glee at the success of their errand, and so full of plans and preparations for Garibaldi's début, that no one could think of anything so commonplace as caramels.

The man who had posted the bills, and whom they found eating his dinner at the village hotel, proved to

be the keeper of the animals. He also owned an interest in the show, and had authority to allow them to keep the bear, and he gave them this permission in lieu of the promised reward, the more readily for the reason that, on account of the illness of the manager, and also because of some trouble about the location of the tent, which they had wished to erect on an old race-course at Belford lower village, the performances were to be postponed for several days.

The boys were to keep Captain Jack over two nights, and were to have the great performance on the second night, that they might have plenty of time for preparation. It was necessary that Garibaldi should have as many rehearsals as possible, in view of the danger that Captain Jack would, as Philander said, "take the shine off him;" and these rehearsals were held with closed doors, and the air was full of mystery.

In spite of the great event which was approaching Cherry's mind was full of the problem of what Dilly Gage would do in this new state of things, which she and Phonse had been the means of bringing about. She could not be sorry, she said to herself, for the exposure of such a fraud, but yet Dilly's face, with its look of suffering, haunted her. Phonse must have told by this time. Why did not some one speak of it? Uncle David was always reticent, but Phonse was not likely to confine the telling to him, and Loveday would be sure to make it a subject of nine days' wonder and speculation. The whole village would be in a state of excitement about it, for Byerly had but few sensations, and the fact that there was a division in public opinion concerning the railroad case had kept alive the interest in it.

Phonse did not seem as much relieved by the discovery that he had not been the means of wronging the

Gages as Cherry thought it natural that he should feel; he went about scowling. But then he did not approve of training animals, and was scornful of the proposed Great Exhibition. (That was the name that had been chosen by the boys as the most modest that had suggested itself.) Perhaps it was his sympathy for Garibaldi and the bear that was making him unhappy, Cherry thought.

It was while they were at breakfast the next morning that Farmer Pritchard, who lived near them, came and stood in the open window with his folded arms resting on the sill, with his hat pushed back from his heated brow, and evidently in a state of too great excitement for ordinary greetings.

"Well, now, squire, them folks that calc'lated the railroad company had cheated old Gage out of his rights, and them doctors that said he was blind, and paralyzed, and dyin' by inches, have got to sing small, haven't they? They must feel consid'able meachin'!"

Uncle David looked at him with wondering inquiry. "Think of him bein' ketched that way! 'Twas as good as a show. You don't mean to say, squire, that you hain't heard that old Gage was ketched down cellar eatin' baked beans? Why, the story they tell down in the village is that 'twas your nephew Phonse that ketched him—Phonse and Cherry. That girl of old Gage's—Dilly, I b'lieve they call her—she let it out to Cally Bumpus; she happened to go in yesterday mornin'; and that girl was takin' on as if she was distracted, and Cally got it out of her what had happened. Old Gage wa'n't nowhere round, and now they say he has run away. He took all his money (some thinks he had consid'able) and never left the girl a cent. That's what she says, I expect. It's just as well not to believe anything that old Gage's girl says."

"Phonse and Cherry," said Uncle David, knitting his brows, as he looked from one to the other, "is it true that you knew this—that it was you who made the discovery, and you concealed it?" Uncle David's tone was perplexed, as well as severe.

"We—we—I didn't mean to conceal it," faltered Cherry. "I couldn't bear to tell, I pitied Dilly so; but I thought that Phonse had. He said we must."

"Said you must! It seems very strange that you should wish to be a party to such an imposition as that, and that's what you were when you concealed it. If they had chosen to brave it out and keep up the imposition, I suppose you would never have told what you saw!"

"I expect the bear drove it out of their heads," interposed Loveday, who always tried to shield every one of the flock, but especially Cherry and Phonse.

"No, it wasn't that," said Phonse, calmly, although with a frowning brow. "I didn't forget, and I meant to tell at once, but I thought it would be mean not to let Cherry do as she liked, when she felt so badly about that girl. She believes in that girl, and she knows no one else will; but I knew she would tell in time."

"I never believed in Dilly Gage," said Rhoda, triumphantly. "I thought it was horrid, if her father really was hurt, that the railroad shouldn't pay him; but I always thought she was a bad girl, and of course anybody would know that if her father was making believe she must—"

"Cherry, I wish you would learn to be a little more frank and straightforward," said Uncle David.

"I knew she and Phonse had a secret," said Rhoda; "but then they so often have. There was that arithmetic—"

Rhoda stopped short, either because Phonse's scowl was so black or from some better impulse.

Her father was questioning Phonse and Cherry. Phonse readily told the story of the visit which Cherry and he had made to the Roaring Brook settlement.

"The girl did act as if she were surprised," he said. "Cherry thinks she was."

"What did you think?" asked Uncle David.

Phonse looked at Cherry and hesitated. It was a kind look, as if he disliked to make her feel badly. And it was to spare her feelings that he had not told what they had discovered! Such thoughtfulness was so new in Phonse that Cherry's heart swelled, and a choking sob arose in her throat.

"What did you think?" repeated Uncle David, sharply.

"Well, I thought she might be pretending," admitted Phonse. "Still, if she knew that he could get up I shouldn't think she would have made us come in."

"It seems probable that they got up the plot, and carried it out together," said Uncle David; "but I don't know that it signifies much whether the girl had anything to do with it or not. I am very glad that the old man has betrayed himself; not that I had much doubt, but the matter has created a great deal of hard feeling against the railroad company. I don't understand why you didn't come at once and tell me, since you knew how much annoyance I had had about it. I wish you would remember, Cherry, that sympathy, as well as charity, should begin at home."

Cherry sat silent, her eyes full of hot tears, feeling herself misjudged and misunderstood. Had she not always wished, above all things, to be frank and straightforward? And, although she disliked so much to tell what they had discovered, she would surely have done so if she had not thought Phonse would relieve her

from all responsibility. Phonse, in trying to be kind to her, had got them both into trouble.

Loveday found her in tears, in the rainy-day attic, where Rhoda would be sure not to come.

"I don't see as it's anything more than a blunder," she said, "and I wouldn't feel so about it, if I was you, dearie. Of course you expected Phonse to tell; it wa'n't a mite like him not to, when he's been so dreadful down on them Gages."

"Phonse thinks a great deal more about hurting my feelings than he used to, Loveday," said Cherry, finding a little balm in that thought. "He seems to think more of other people every way since that day in court. I think it's because he has felt so badly himself."

"Ah, that's the way of it, dearie. Sometimes I think it's the meanin' of it all—all the sufferin' in the world is learnin', and the mistakes goes for strength, if we take 'em right. If they do say you ain't frank and straightforward it's only on account of them sums. You wasn't so much to blame as folks might think that didn't know all about it; but any kind of deceivin' is wrong, and all you can do is to learn a lesson from it, and bear folkses' misjudgin' patient, and so kind of live it down."

Loveday was a comforter. Cherry almost always found her so, and she had never felt any lack in her, or realized the need of a wiser or more educated person as a guide, although she was perfectly conscious of the weakness of Loveday's grammar — Uncle David had himself taken great pains to prevent the children from imitating her speech—and knew that she refused to be convinced that Christopher Columbus was not born in Ohio, because didn't her aunt live in his native place? and thought that the Pilgrim Fathers' claim to distinc-

tion rested upon the fact that they had originated the Plymouth Rock breed of hens.

Loveday frankly acknowledged that she "wa'n't no great of a scholar," and Philander had even expressed a doubt whether she had "as much of a head-piece as some," but the children never doubted that Loveday's judgment was to be trusted in moral points; and if you went to her with a trouble, from a toothache to a heart-ache, you were sure to feel "like one whom his mother comforteth." But yet, even while Loveday was soothing Cherry's woes, Uncle David was pacing the floor of his "den," with a deep furrow between his brows, meditating upon the misdemeanors of Cherry and Phonse, and upon a letter which he had received, the day before, from his sister, whom the children knew as Aunt Adam, because her husband's name was Adam, and who had expressed the opinion that it was far from proper that the bringing up of the children should be intrusted to Loveday, who, although undoubtedly "as good as gold," was but a servant, and ignorant. It was an old worry, which was continually being brought freshly to Uncle David's mind, but perhaps the girls had never been in such imminent danger of the boarding-school which they dreaded as on this day.

When the sting of Uncle David's reproof had somewhat softened, Cherry began to feel a greater pity than ever for Dilly. It seemed likely that, as Phonse said, no one else would believe in her. She could not help thinking that Uncle David's remark that it mattered little whether she were guilty or not sounded heartless.

Was no one to offer her any sympathy or help if she were innocent? And if she were guilty, poor, untaught Dilly, was no one to pity bad people? Perplexing problems were vexing Cherry's brain, problems which had never troubled them until Dilly Gage's hard fort-



"LOVEDAY FOUND HER IN TEARS IN THE RAINY-DAY ATTIC."

unes had roused her sympathy, while, in the mean time, Ben and Simmy Backup, with only the cares of the ambitious showman upon them, were rapidly and gayly pushing forward the preparations for the Great Exhibition. There were some difficulties. Garibaldi was unable to understand Captain Jack's playful little familiarities, and his fright at first reduced him to his natural porcine stupidity; it seemed doubtful whether he would display his acquirements to great advantage in such disturbing company. But after a while the force of habit proved stronger than fear, and Garibaldi performed his tricks with his usual grunting reluctance. Then the boys were struck by the painful probability that Captain Jack would "take the shine off him." There never was such a bear. The glowing advertisements of the show had but feebly described him. Ben felt that his phrase "the uniquest bear in the world," which had struck him as very happy, was altogether inadequate.

"It's of no use to talk about him," said Simmy, impressively. "Nobody would believe what he can do. I knew he was the greatest thing in the show last year, and I didn't half see him."

Little Caleb Backup seemed to be impressed by him with a very curious idea.

"Is he a truly bear?" he demanded, regarding him steadfastly, with his hands in the pockets of his first trousers. "He looks as if Philander had told him."

And this tribute to his story-telling powers almost recompensed Philander for the mortifications he had suffered in the matter of the bear-hunt.

"Of course you expect a bear to perform better than a pig," Ben remarked, consolingly, to Simmy, who was evidently depressed by doubts concerning Garibaldi's success. "They have more brains, naturally; and then

just think of Captain Jack's advantages! Garibaldi isn't what you could really call professional."

"We've taken an orfle lot of pains with him," said Simmy, wiping his heated brow. (He was sitting upon a barrel in an interval between the rehearsals.) "It doesn't seem as if any two fellows ever worked so hard. And now he can only stand on his hind-legs—and he won't unless he feels just like it—and shoulder arms, and walk on the barrel, and you know, Ben, he doesn't do any of those tricks so very well; we may have to help him right before people."

"No one expects him to do them well; the wonder is that he can do them at all, being a pig," said Ben.

"Well, it is a wonder," said Simmy, brightening. "And, I say, Ben, considering that, I think we really ought to make the admission fee more than ten cents." Having accepted Ben's hopeful view of the matter, Simmy began immediately to consider its pecuniary bearings. "You see, it's been so much work to educate him that we really can't afford to exhibit him for ten cents," he continued, as Ben hesitated. "And the bear thrown in! It's too much for the money."

"But so many of the fellows can't raise any more," said Ben, with a sympathetic accent. "Lots of the little shavers can't. Dody Hollis asked me if we wouldn't take pins and old iron. He had a quart pail about half full of old rusty nails, and he said his little sister was picking up pins; she wouldn't stop to eat her dinner. They'll be orfly disappointed, you know."

"Old iron and pins for such a show as that!" said Simmy, indignantly.

"Of course that wouldn't do," said Ben. "People would say it couldn't be much of a show. It might hurt Garibaldi's prospects. But I really think, Simmy,

the proceeds will be larger if we ask ten cents than they would at fifteen."

"Well, then," said Simmy, reluctantly. "But no compliment'ries."

Ben looked annoyed, and somewhat shamefaced, for had he not already planned to bestow a large number of free tickets upon the small gatherers of old iron and pins, and also upon Billy Hitchcock, who had wished to trade his only available possession, the secret of a woodchuck's nest, for tickets; and upon little Paley Goodwin, who had proposed to "swap" the miscellaneous contents of his pocket, including a square of molasses taffy, a broken knife, and a small cucumber pickle.

"I'll tell you how we'll manage it, Simmy," said Ben, after a moment's reflection. "I *should* like to give a few compliment'ries to my friends; they'll expect it, you know; and I'll deduct the expense from my share of the profits."

"I sha'n't do any such mean thing as that," said Simmy, stoutly. "We'll share and share alike. But I guess I know who your friends are," he added, in a melancholy tone. "They're every feller in this town who hasn't money enough to pay for a ticket. Some of 'em have, too, only you let 'em impose on you. I think we ought to put 'No Deadheads,' in big letters, on the bill. That sounds business-like."

Ben agreed to this, the more readily, perhaps, because he did not think his friends were likely to be easily alarmed.

No sooner was this difficulty satisfactorily disposed of than another presented itself. It seemed doubtful whether the programme would be sufficiently varied, with only two performers, and it was decided that little Caleb, who was renowned for his declamatory

gifts, as displayed at Sunday and day school, should be induced to assist. Little Caleb readily assented to this arrangement, only stipulating that his name should appear upon the bills in as large letters as those of the bear and the pig. He evidently regarded it as an honor to be invited to "speak a piece" in such a distinguished company. But it was found, upon investigation, that none of little Caleb's pieces were "lively" enough to be appropriate for such an entertainment, therefore a new one must be found in all haste, and little Caleb industriously coached in it. And then it seemed difficult to find one that was exactly suitable. Philander thought that age could not wither nor custom stale "My name is Norval," and "The boy stood on the burning deck"; but all the others pronounced them quite too old-fashioned. Loveday was very anxious that he should recite "The Futility of Fame," in an old reading-book which she produced from the attic, and which she said had been a famous piece for declamation when she was young, but Simmy objected to the subject; he thought it might be regarded as a reflection upon the bear; and the others thought it "too dry"; Philander's next choice was "Marco Bozarris," but this was open to the objection of containing too many large words, and was also calculated to display little Caleb's lisp too freely. The girls thought the lisp "cunning," but it was a great source of mortification to Simmy, and to little Caleb himself, as being unmanly. But in spite of this latter objection the declamation finally selected was one which little Caleb himself called "The Thmack in Thcool." This was to be supplemented by "The Yarn of the *Nancy Bell*," if little Caleb could possibly learn it in time. He had not only a remarkable memory, but a great deal of application, for a small person, and before the momentous

hour for opening the doors arrived, it was decided that, with a prompter behind the scenes (in Rory's stall), little Caleb might be trusted to do his part successfully. Ben was the fortunate owner of a printing-press, and neither labor nor printer's ink was spared for this great occasion. Little Caleb saw, with round-eyed wonder and delight, his own name in very large letters between the bear's and the pig's. It would have been useless to talk to little Caleb about the futility of fame after that! Philander's name was also on the bill, both as "violin soloist" and "accompanist." Ben, who had a prudent mind, thought that as it was quite probable that Garibaldi would decline an encore, the disappointment of the audience should be soothed at once by some lively tunes.

It had been an extremely warm day, and now, at sunset, some dark clouds in the west threatened a thunder-shower.

"People won't stay away from such a show as this because of a shower; you needn't worry," said Ben to Simmy, who was so very tired that he was inclined to gloomy views.

"I've got an orfle feeling," said Simmy, impressively. "I think it's what our Lizy Ann calls a presentiment. I think that Garibaldi will get a stage fright."

CHAPTER XV.

Ben's prophecy that a few black clouds would not keep Byerly boys and girls away from such a show as that proved correct. Long before the barn doors were opened the crowd gathered around them in as great a variety of toilets as the beggars that came to town

in Mother Goose's rhyme. Sunday best and ragged jackets and bare feet jostled each other in happy unconsciousness of anything but the thrilling delights in store for them behind those tantalizing doors. It looked as if Simmy had not been unjust in ascribing to Ben very lax views in the matter of a free list; many small and not over-clean hands held in a joyful clutch one of the precious "compliment'ries."

Philander had attended to all the latest details, from the bear's toilet and the Japanese lanterns along the drive-way to little Caleb's deportment, evidently as much excited as any one, although he felt it necessary to the maintenance of his dignity to speak of the exhibition occasionally as "boys' foolishness." He was now tuning his violin, and the suggestive squeakings which issued from the barn were raising the impatience of the crowd to a high pitch.

Rhoda and Cherry were standing upon the back porch looking at the throng, and agreed, for once, in admiration of the conduct of two large boys who had taken their small brothers upon their shoulders, in anticipation of the great rush which was sure to follow the opening of the doors. Suddenly the familiar rattle and jingle of a tin-peddler's wagon struck upon Cherry's ear.

"If it isn't that girl!" cried Rhoda. "She is turning into the drive-way. I think she is coming to the exhibition. I never saw any one so bold."

But Dilly drove up to the porch instead of to the barn door. The horse that Cherry had given her was drawing the wagon, and he looked as meek and docile as if he had drawn a tin-wagon all his life.

"I come to see if you would let me pay for him on instalments," said Dilly, indicating the horse by a nod. "First off I calc'lated I'd fetch him right back; then

I sat down and thought what I was goin' to do. Poor folks can't sit down and cry; it's shif'less."

Cherry shrewdly suspected that Dilly had indulged in this "shif'less" proceeding to some extent, for her face was very pale, and there were dark circles around her eyes.

"I *was* beat," continued Dilly. "There didn't seem to be anything I could do that there was any call for, 'thout it was tin-peddlin'. I don't expect I've got bumps like some folks, and I hain't been to the 'cademy, but I have got a tradin' bump, if I do say it. Why, I've done 'most as well as ever—as ever father did." (Dilly had to swallow a lump when she said father, but she swallowed it determinedly.) "But I can't do without a horse; and it didn't seem, first off, as if I could keep this one anyhow. There ain't any reason why you should give me a horse, and I ain't goin' to let nobody give me anything as long as I can work. But if you'll let me keep him, and pay for him as I can, I'll be real obliged to you."

"You would have had your old Jane if it hadn't been for me. I wish you would keep that horse as a gift, Dilly," said Cherry.

"I couldn't, anyhow; 'twould keep worryin' me," said Dilly, with decision. "I think you're real good, Cherry Eastman. Other folks besides you has been good to me; there's lots that's traded with me when they wouldn't have if it hadn't been for helpin' me along; but there ain't never been any of your kind of folks, stuck-up folks, that has treated me real friendly and as if I was like folks but just you." Dilly's voice actually threatened to break in a sob, but she mastered it with dignity. "I'd take a present from you quicker 'n I would from anybody else, but them that hain't got much else has got to keep their independence."

"Pay for it if you like, then, Dilly," said Cherry, not without a sympathetic shake in her own voice—"at least for my share. I don't know what Uncle David will say."

"I don't believe she will ever pay for it, anyway," said Rhoda aside to Cherry. "Why doesn't she offer to pay a part now? She says she has earned money."

Rhoda's tone was not low enough to escape Dilly's quick ears.

"It ain't any of your business why I don't pay any now," she exclaimed, with all her old-time sharpness. "But if you want to know, it's because I haven't got a cent—not a single cent. But it ain't any of your business where it's gone to, neither."

It was true, then, that her father had left her penniless, thought Cherry. He had taken the money that she had earned.

"I wouldn't stay and talk to that perfectly dreadful girl, Cherry. I never saw any one so rude," said Rhoda, retreating into the hall.

"I'm sorry I sarced her," said Dilly, penitently, "I be, 'cause she's your cousin. But she needn't have meddled. It don't take any great to make me mad, but I don't holler out at folks that sarce me, nor I don't chase 'em and lick 'em as I used to, and it *is* 'cause you said 'twas better not to. I said it wa'n't, but it was; so there!"

It evidently cost Dilly something to make this confession, for she immediately changed the subject, and her tone was harder, as she went on: "I've been c'lecting rags. They've been dull, but they're gettin' real brisk. Old Mis' Hollis she's been savin' for rugs, more'n a year, and then her eyes give out, so she let me have 'em; and Miss Sibley, the dress-maker, she clears out her attic this time of the year, when dress-

makin' is dull; them two bags is brimful of her rags, and I tell you there's some handsome pieces among 'em! You remember the time Dr. Wallace's granddaughter got married? Well, there's pieces of every one of her dresses, and of them cousins of hers that was bridesmaids. Miss Sibley she just had her girl sweep 'em up as if they wa'n't no more'n common rags!"

"Wouldn't you like to stay to the exhibition, Dilly? It's very funny to see the bear dance, and it's good for people to laugh when they feel badly," said Cherry, eagerly. "I can get you a ticket."

Dilly hesitated, with a look of unmistakable longing towards the barn. Here was one of the good times which had never seemed to come in her way, and it was very lonely in her old house by the brook, with only the brook's roaring for company.

"I should like to see that bear," she admitted. "It's the same cretur that you and me saw in the road, ain't it? Folks can't say but what 'twas the bear they saw every time, can they?" she added, in a low tone. "Has that long-legged feller that was down to my house with you got anything to do with the show?"

"Phonse? No, he hasn't," answered Cherry.

"Because I wouldn't go to no show of his," said Dilly. "He's always been sarcy to me, and I don't like him. I expect he'd do anything to spite me."

"Perhaps you don't quite understand him," said Cherry; but she said it rather faintly. She had said it to many people, and to no one who seemed less likely to know what she meant than Dilly. "But he has nothing to do with the show; he doesn't approve of it. My cousin Ben and Simmy Backup found the bear, and they are going to exhibit him; and it is they who have trained the pig."

"A pig! can he do tricks, honest?" asked Dilly, with eager interest. "I see him once in Backup's barn. I guess you was there too. I expect I sarced you consid'able. 'Twas before you 'n' me got real well acquainted. I wouldn't do it now. I never had no chance to learn to be like folks." There was again a hint of breaking down in Dilly's voice, but again she controlled it. "He wa'n't nothin' more'n a common pig, as fur as I could see, only kind of slicked up a little. Beats all what a sight animals can learn, don't it? I am acquainted with the man that has the doin's of that bear, and of all the animals in that show that the bear b'longs to. He's Mr. 'Kiah Pringle, Grandpa Pringle we always called him, that used to live down at the foot of Tumble Down Hill, where Hez Lowry's folks lives now. He had a granddaughter that was about the age of me, Phœbe Pringle. I used to set more by her than I did by any other girl. But they up and moved away, and now she's dead, Phœbe is. He couldn't hardly bear to speak of her, Grandpa Pringle couldn't, when I met him down to the village. He said he was calc'latin' to settle down and have Phœbe to keep house for him, comfortable; he'd been workin' hard and savin' up for that, and now she's been took away. He's an orfle good old man. I expect he'll be to the show; he said he wanted to see how them youngsters would make out with the bear. I *be* goin' to stay to that show! I never see a performin' bear in my life. It looks some as if it was goin' to rain, but it don't look any more so than it did an hour ago. I'll hitch the horse right here to the fence. No, I don't want no supper, nor the horse don't. I always carry something for both of us, 'cause I'm apt to be late. But you—you are real good to think of it." ("Manners" came hard to Dilly, but they were evidently genuine.)

Cherry, with Ben's permission, escorted Dilly to the barn by the private entrance (through the wood-shed) and placed her in one of the best seats. As she was leaving her, Dilly beckoned her back.

"Say, you don't believe that I knew anything about it—about father; that he wa'n't blind nor anything, do you?"

"No, I don't believe you did," said Cherry.

"I kind of thought you didn't," said Dilly, drawing a long breath. "But I wa'n't goin' to stay without I knew you didn't."

"Cherry, I think it is very strange of you to make so much of that girl," said Rhoda, whom Cherry found waiting for her in the wood-shed; "after she was so dreadfully rude to me, too. I asked Ben not to give you a ticket for her, but you make those boys do just as you say. No one would suppose that I was the—the mistress of the house."

"She was rude," admitted Cherry, ignoring Rhoda's dignified claim to respect; "but she said she was sorry. And what you said *was* horrid, Rhoda."

"I didn't say it to her. She shouldn't have been listening. And she won't pay for the horse; you'll see."

But the prophecy was lost upon Cherry, who had flown off to relight one of the Japanese lanterns, which had gone out.

The great barn doors had been opened by this time, and Philander, as master of ceremonies, was endeavoring to prevent too great rushing and pushing.

"Land sakes! there wa'n't no such crowdin' as this when I was to the King's coronation, 'way off to Cuby, in Spain," he cried.

"Cuba isn't in Spain," declared Jackey Batterson, who had "a taste exact for actual fact." "And there never was a coronation—"

"It's allowable to talk book fashion to a show, Jackey Batterson," Philander explained, with dignity. "And there's more things in this world than the jography tells about. I ain't sayin' nothin' against the jography," continued Philander; "it's jest as necessary as meat and pertatoes; but because we've got to have meat and pertatoes ain't no sign that we shouldn't have peanuts and peppermints sometimes. There's real facts and there's story-tellin' facts."

But the crowd had grown impatient of Philander's philosophy, in its eagerness to get the best places to see the bear. There were some men and women in the throng, all with as keen a twinkle of anticipation in their eyes as the boys, and Deacon Backup, who did not altogether approve of circuses or shows, occupied a front seat. The front seats were chairs; behind those were benches and stools and boxes and boards. The hay-lofts, carefully railed with ladders and boards by Philander to prevent accidents, served as galleries.

Two of the performers were in their element—Philander and the bear. Philander was "more to home with a fiddle than some," as he modestly admitted. Deacon Backup said he made it "talk right out." Certainly the dancing-tunes that Philander was bringing out of his old fiddle to-night would cause a tingling in the feet of anything that could dance. And this bear did not do his duty reluctantly, like most performing animals, but danced as if his toes really tingled. He evidently found the crowd of spectators inspiring, for he had never displayed his talents in rehearsal as he was displaying them now. He made bows that little Caleb could never hope to equal with all Philander's teaching; he threw kisses at the (hay-loft) galleries, and then pretended to fire a pistol at them; he seized



"THE 'STARS' OF THE GREAT EXHIBITION."

Philander's violin, and tucking it under his chin, and with his head on one side, he drew an imaginary bow across it. The spectators were convulsed with laughter. Captain Jack was enough to make any one forget his cares, unless it might be Garibaldi's owner, who was harassed by a conviction that Garibaldi's performances must seem very tame and stupid after this, if, indeed, Garibaldi, unaccustomed to crowds, were not seized with a "stage fright."

It was difficult to withdraw Captain Jack. He was intoxicated with his triumphs, and determined to go on performing. When at length Philander succeeded in getting him behind the scenes, there was a great whistling and stamping (it must be confessed that the breeding of the audience was not everything that could be desired), and calls of "The bear! the bear!" which only partially ceased when little Caleb, fresh from the trying ordeal of having his hair curled with the kitchen poker, was led before the audience. And then it was the unexpected that happened. Little Caleb, the hero of a half-dozen Sunday-school festivals, the distinguished orator of primary-school exhibition days, affected either by an unusually smart costume and the kitchen poker, or by the excitement of attaining his heart's desire and appearing between the bear and the pig—little Caleb showed the white feather! No sooner had he looked upon the audience than he drew his Hamburg-embroidery sleeve across his eyes and burst out crying. They were not sobs, but roars, that burst from little Caleb's troubled breast. There was a murmur of sympathy from the audience, mingled, I regret to say, with a few only half-smothered hisses. To some of the boys, little Caleb Backup "speaking a piece" was quite too mild a form of entertainment after that most remarkable bear. As little Caleb and his woes

disappeared from sight, shouts of "The bear! the bear!" arose from all quarters of the barn.

"Bring on Garibaldi, boys! now's your time!" said Jacky Batterson, who, as an intimate friend of the proprietors, occupied a front seat and was privileged to go behind the curtain, which consisted of some ancient chintz bed-hangings hastily sewed together. "He'll be sure to make a hit; they'll like him so much better than little Caleb." (Alas for little Caleb, with his blasted ambition! Every one was too excited to pity him much—every one except his mother.) "They're getting orfle impatient. It's a good thing to have them a little so, but it doesn't do, you know, to get them mad." (Jacky Batterson prided himself upon his managerial ability.) "Where is Garibaldi?"

Alas and alas! where was Garibaldi? Cleaned until he was as white as snow, scented with Rhoda's best perfumery, and with a bow of blue satin ribbon adorning his collar, the graceless pig had taken advantage of the open window in the stall in which he had been left in this unfamiliar barn to make a jump out into the pigsty, where, after frantic searching, he was at length discovered enjoying himself with his kind, and as wholly unpresentable as if he had never had the least education.

It seemed an overwhelming calamity, and Simmy gave way to despair.

"He's nothing but a pig, after all the pains we've taken," he complained. "Now, what are we going to do? Just hear those boys shout and stamp! It's enough to drive a fellow crazy!"

"I knew we'd got to have an orfle lot of patience to educate a pig, but I didn't expect anything quite so bad as this," said Ben, ruefully. "We ought not to have left him in that stall with an open window just over

the pigsty. But, you see, no pig but a trained one would ever have taken such a leap as that. But he only needs cleaning; Nehemiah will do it. We'll make a success of this yet, Simmy."

In fact, Nehemiah, Deacon Backup's hired man, had already appeared from the audience, full of good-natured zeal.

"We shall have to let the bear go on again; they won't wait," said Simmy.

"Don't you do it," counselled Jacky Batterson, eagerly. They'll be getting tired of tricks and won't appreciate the pig. Let Philander play lots of lively tunes."

Jacky Batterson was considered authority in these matters, and Philander accordingly appeared before the curtain, bowed in a care-free and even jovial manner, as if there were no trouble behind the scenes, and announced that after he had played "a few selections" the "educated pig Garibaldi, the wonder of the age," would appear. And then Philander played so gayly that Captain Jack danced in his stall, and suddenly, to the great consternation of the managers, broke the rope that fastened him and went and poked his head out at the side of the curtain. Ben drew him back with difficulty, while the audience applauded wildly.

"They don't want nothin' but the bear," said Philander, returning to the privacy afforded by the curtain, and wiping his heated brow. "And I expect nothin' but what that bear will get obstreperous, bein' kept back so. Hark! that's him a-growlin' now, ain't it?"

"No, it isn't, it's thunder," said Ben, somewhat shortly. Ben couldn't help feeling scornful that Philander, who claimed to have fought single-handed with panthers and sharks, should be afraid of a tame bear.

Garibaldi had been rescued from his wallowing in the mire and restored to the guise of an educated pig, freshly perfumed, and adorned with a brand-new scarlet ribbon, which Rhoda, with true generosity, since she had strongly disapproved of the pig-training, had produced from her ribbon-box. Simmy led him—dragged, I am obliged to confess, would be the better word—before the curtain, amid the great applause of the audience. The rifle which he was to shoulder and present, the barrel which he was to walk, the hoops through which he was to jump, were all before him. Garibaldi looked at them with, apparently, his customary piggish stupidity; then he looked at the crowd of spectators. Their shouts and laughter rang in his ears; the lights blazed in his eyes; it was too much for the heart in any piggish bosom to endure. Garibaldi broke away from the firm grasp which Simmy had kept upon his collar. Ben, who had come out from behind the curtain to assist in Garibaldi's performances, was just in time to see him make a wild rush into the midst of the throng of spectators.

"Stop him! stop him!" cried Simmy, wildly.

There was a panic in the audience. Girls screamed and jumped upon their seats. A few boys tried to stop the pig; mischievous urchins cheered him on. Some one caught him, but he broke away with frantic squealing.

Philander, with philosophical calmness, kept on playing "Money Musk."

It was difficult for a moment to discover what had become of the pig, who was as stupid in his flight as any uneducated pig in the world.

"A pig! I shouldn't think Squire Brewster would have allowed it," Cherry heard a lady say, in a tone of great disgust; and she was the very same one who had

called Garibaldi "a pretty fellow" when he appeared in his scarlet necktie!

A girl cried out in horror that the pig had brushed against her; then, suddenly, a white shape was seen rushing through the door-way, and Garibaldi was lost in the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

"LET the bear go on quick—quick!" advised Jacky Batterson.

It was Ben who led out Captain Jack, for Garibaldi's owner, wholly overcome by the jeers and hootings of the boys—those boys to whom he had made such proud boasts of Garibaldi's talents—had fled to the privacy of a stall, and was lying prone, with his face buried in the straw.

"He's nothing but a pig after all!" he groaned aloud, in the bitterness of his mortification. "Education won't *take* on him any more'n my vaccination did."

The bear was as full of spirits as ever, and constantly displayed new accomplishments; and it was quite evident that the spectators cared little for any failures in the programme since the bear was such a success.

It was raining heavily now, and occasionally a zig-zag streak of lightning could be seen through the open doors.

But who cared for that while they could laugh till they cried at the antics of that bear? The boys lingered reluctantly after the bear had made his final bow, and Philander had dismissed the spectators in what he felt to be a very neat speech. His apologies had been

received with cheers, and the assurance that it was a great show; the bear alone was worth the money.

Condolences were being kindly offered behind the scenes, and some comments were made that were not very kindly received by the educators of the pig.

"Now I hope you'll be satisfied to let him be a pig," said Phonse, who was evidently not at all sorry that Garibaldi had made a failure.

"I thought he would behave badly, and I am as glad as can be that he did," said Rhoda, who felt that anybody had a right to speak her mind who had sacrificed two satin ribbons and a bottle and a half of perfumery to the cause. "It was such a horrid thing to do; it seemed so common. I was so mortified to hear, all over town, that my brother was educating a pig!"

"He wasn't just a common pig," said Simmy, hotly. "We never let him associate with pigs. He never was in a sty in his life until to-night. If we had had sense enough to have a rehearsal, with lights and a lot of people, it would have been all right."

"I wonder what has become of him. It is raining as hard as it can pour," said Phonse, anxiously.

"I'm afraid some of the people will have a hard time getting home," said Ben; "but most of them had lanterns."

"I saw Philander going home with Mrs. Presby and her little girls, and Uncle David gave the Fling girls a lantern," said Cherry. "Oh, I forgot Dilly Gage!" she added, with a pang of remorse at her carelessness.

"She put her horse into the carriage-house when it began to rain—Uncle David told her to," said Phonse—"but there wasn't room for the wagon."

"Wet rags and feather-dusters will be for sale cheap to-morrow," said Jacky Batterson, facetiously.

"She can't go home, away down to Roaring Brook,

alone to-night," said Phonse aside to Cherry, with a frowning brow.

Cherry ran in search of Dilly, and found her trying to cover some of her wares with some old canvas bags.

"You can't go home to-night, Dilly. They say there are no signs that it will stop raining. You can have your wagon put into the barn, and you come into the house with me."

"I ain't a-comin'," said Dilly. "So you just go right along in out of the rain. I expect I shall have to have the wagon put into your barn. I don't know how I come to be so carried away by that bear. I never knew whether I was horseback or afoot. If 'twas your house, Cherry Eastman, I expect I should stay, but I ain't a-goin' to be beholden, more'n I can help, to folks that don't b'lieve in me, and ain't no friends to me. I'm jest goin' acrost the fields to Mis' Sally Pitkin's. She liked my mother, and she'll let me stay with her."

"But it's so far to Mrs. Sally Pitkin's, Dilly. And it *pours*. And it keeps lightning so frightfully," said Cherry, persuasively. "Wait a while, at least, and see if it doesn't hold up."

"'Tain't goin' to, and I ain't goin' to wake Mis' Pitkin up 'most midnight."

Philander, who had come back, and was wheeling the tin-wagon into the barn, said he would go "acrost to Mis Pitkin's with her, with the lantern, anyhow."

"You jest stop where you be!" said Dilly, imperatively; "you're a-drippin' now. And I don't need any light. I know every step of the way; and I can see by the lightnin', anyhow."

"Gals is stubborn, and she's the beatermost. I expect she *can* keep in the path," said Philander, holding

up his lantern so that it shed its beams upon the slight figure going sturdily off into the darkness.

"Has she gone?" asked Rhoda, as Cherry entered the house. "Well, I shouldn't think she would have felt like staying. Did you see how people stared at her? And she didn't seem to be thinking of anything but the bear! Well, I suppose one really can't expect her to have feelings like other people. Did her rags and things get wet?" Rhoda added this last question with an air of sudden interest.

"I don't suppose it would hurt them much—anything but the feather-dusters," said Cherry, thinking that Rhoda had more kindly interest in Dilly than she seemed to have, or she would not have thought of the possible injury to her wares.

Philander and the boys were busy in the barn, removing the seats and the Japanese lanterns, and restoring the animals to their proper quarters, Simmy enlivening the proceedings by the candid expression of his opinion of shows, and of the hollowness of the world in general.

In the mean time Dilly, who had set out so sturdily, was fast coming to grief in the field. To know every step of the way by daylight does not insure one's footsteps in almost utter darkness. She found herself suddenly brought up against a stone wall, where, according to her previous ideas, no stone wall should have been. All familiar landmarks seemed to have changed places.

"I never used to b'lieve the earth turned round when I went to school, but I guess it's done it once, anyhow! It don't seem as if *I* could have got so turned round when I was goin' right straight along," said Dilly to herself. One of Dilly's weaknesses was a great fear of lightning. She could not summon sufficient

presence of mind to take her bearings by its flashes. "The idea of their askin' me if I wa'n't scairt! Of course I'm scairt of lightnin', but I wa'n't goin' to stay there, anyhow. Oh dear, if I could only ketch a glimpse of Mis' Sally Pitkin's old black house! It ought to be right over there. Why, land sakes! if that ain't the road that I just come from!" as a particularly brilliant flash illuminated the landscape for an instant. "I've most turned right round again. I can get back into the road, and I declare I b'lieve I shall have to go back. I never see such rain nor such lightnin' in all my born days. There 'tis again. There's the road and Squire Brewster's barn—that's all I can make out—and that ain't where it ought to be! But I expect, if things have a mind to turn themselves round, I've got to humor 'em, and I *can* get to the barn, it's so near, if it don't take a notion to clear out somewheres else. If I could only get into the barn without anybody's knowin' it, I could be real comfortable on the hay. But I expect they've locked it up before this time."

The barn remained stationary, which was better fortune than Dilly expected, and before she reached the road she saw a cheering light streaming from its half-opened door. "If I can only get in unbeknownst! I'd most rather lay down here in the road than to let 'em know that I had to come back," thought Dilly, who, it must be admitted, had, on some points, much more pride than sense.

Fortune favored her. Philander and the boys were all engaged in the interesting task of making Captain Jack as secure and as comfortable for the night as possible in one of the stalls, and she slipped into the barn unperceived.

She dared not venture as far as the ladder, but went into the first stall she came to, and by means of the

manger and some convenient beams (Dilly could climb like any boy), and with no hinderances except a remonstrating "moo" from the occupant of the stall, a sleepy old cow, she mounted to the hay-loft. She went into a retired corner and covered herself with hay, thinking it possible that Philander might be moved to come up to the loft with his pitchfork to give the cows a late supper. They were closing the barn for the night now; the great doors slid together and were securely fastened.

"I wa'n't a minute too soon," thought Dilly, rejoicing in her comfortable shelter from the lightning and the rain.

Now she could hear their steps retreating towards the wood-shed.

"Nobody would suppose there had been such goings on in that barn to-night," remarked Ben. "It is just the same as ever now, except for the bear."

"What would they say to know that there was a girl in the hay-loft?" thought Dilly.

She heard them close and fasten the door that communicated with the wood-shed, and then all was still and dark. It was so still that she could hear the faint twitterings of the swallows away up in the eaves, and even the deep breathing of the oxen beneath her. She was wet and chilled, but she soon grew warm in her nest in the hay. "I like being in so much company," she thought. "It is better than being all alone at home. But I ought not to have stayed, although it would have been a pity to miss that bear. The rags are not much wet, and they won't be hurt, anyway; but I am afraid the feather-dusters are spoiled." And Dilly reckoned, with a troubled mind, the value of her feather-dusters. Times were going to be hard with her for a little while, she expected. "I won't mind

going a little short, if only I ain't beholden to anybody. I'm goin' to work like a beaver, for if ever I should get to be town's poor — I couldn't stand that, nohow."

And then Dilly said her prayers, or rather, she said all she could remember of a hymn which Louy Bumpus, Cally's sister, who had lived out as nursery-maid in Springfield, had repeated to her. One of her small charges had said it every night, Louy said, and as soon as Dilly heard it she began to say it every night—to be "like folks." Poor Dilly! It was only gradually that she had come to find a grain of comfort in it. Since her new trouble about her father these were the words that Dilly said oftenest:

"For all the poor, the sick, the sad,
The sinful unto Thee we call."

One might pray for very bad people—that was a comfort. She had always felt, vaguely, that her father was not honest as she was. He had always told her falsehoods, which jarred upon her. She wondered now how she could have been so deceived about his illness. He had not been a good father, but Dilly's heart was full of pity for him.

"For all the poor, the sick, the sad,
The *sinful* unto Thee we call;
Oh, may thy mercy make us glad,
Thou art our Jesus and our all.
Through life's long day—"

And then Dilly's breathing grew as regular as the oxen's, and she slipped away into soft and dreamless sleep.

When Rhoda had taken out her ribbon-box in great haste to find a fresh ribbon for Garibaldi, she had left

the box, contrary to her usual habits, in great disorder—a trifle, but from such trifles important happenings often come. If she had put it carefully in order, and shut her drawer upon it, the peace that had settled upon Flying Hill Farm for the night might have remained undisturbed.

For Rhoda was tired and sleepy; and although a vague idea had crossed her mind, it might and probably would have faded peacefully into oblivion if the sight of those many-hued ribbons had not suddenly revived it.

"I haven't a bit of pink silk, not a single bit," she said to herself, "and nothing else will be half so pretty for that screen. I want my things for the fair to be prettier than the other girls'. Every one will expect it, because I do so much fancy-work, and I shall be mortified if they're not. A bit of Kitty Wallace's bridesmaid dress would be just the thing. It was the loveliest shade I ever saw. I wish I had asked her for a piece before she went abroad; but I suppose Miss Sibley had all the pieces, for she never sends them home. "To think of having a Byerly dress-maker make those lovely silks! But it's just like Dr. Wallace's ideas. Pink would be just the color to go with that silver fringe. Dolly Fiske is making a blue screen. I can't use that old blue silk that Aunt Adam gave me on that account. It isn't a pretty shade, either. I wouldn't ask that girl to give me a piece! I couldn't, anyway, after she was so rude to me, although I suppose she will sell all the pieces for rags. Of course they would be of no use to her. I wish I had asked Cherry to get a piece for me. She wouldn't have minded asking a favor of Dilly Gage, as I should. I wonder how early she will come for her horse and wagon in the morning? As soon as it's daylight, I suppose; and I sha'n't

be awake unless I lie awake all night. I might go and wake Tildy, and ask her to call me; but, then, I should have such a time to wake Cherry, she's such a sleepy-head, and she's apt to be cross when she's sleepy, too. And I should hate to ask her, anyway, because I've always disapproved of her having so much to say to Dilly Gage. Her wagon is in the barn. I might go down and find a piece of the pink silk for myself in her rag-bags. It is not quite proper to meddle with other people's possessions, even Dilly Gage's; but, then, rags are different from anything else. She would never know it, and never be a bit the worse off for my taking it. I might manage to give her a little something through Cherry: that would certainly make it right." Rhoda opened her door a little, and put her head out and listened. "I must wait until the house is quiet. The boys will be late in getting to bed to-night. I shouldn't wonder if Phonse were out hunting for that horrid pig; it would be just like him."

Rhoda sat down in her little chintz-covered arm-chair by the window, but found she was so sleepy that it would not do to be so comfortable; so she sat bolt-upright upon the bed, and visions of a beautiful pink silk silver-fringed screen floated before her. Should she paint field daisies upon it, or wild roses? That silk of Kitty Wallace's dress was an exquisite cameo pink; the wild roses would show to perfection upon it. She could not paint as well as Emma Erskine; that was a drawback; but, then, Emma Erskine would probably have no such silk as that to paint upon. It was not to be found in Chelmsboro's shops. She might have gone to Miss Sibley and asked for a piece of it, if she had only known that she had some pieces. Well, after all, this was but a trifling thing to do—to take a piece of waste silk out of a rag-bag, and"—a bright idea sud-

denly struck her—"she would put a piece of silk into the bag in its place—a piece of the blue silk that Aunt Adam had given her. Then, if Dilly Gage should wish to use the silk instead of selling it as rags, that would do just as well for her.

Having soothed her conscience in this way, Rhoda had no misgivings left except those slight ones which were connected with the "pokerishness" of the barn in the night. But she had a strength of purpose which was not likely to give way before so slight an obstacle as that. She was not like Dilly Gage, who admitted that she was "scairt," but refused to give way to it. It was Rhoda's way to declare to herself that she was not in the least afraid, because there was nothing to be afraid of, and by these different methods of reasoning she and Dilly Gage arrived at the same results; they were never what Simmy called, with stout-hearted scorn (in broad daylight), "'fraid-cats."

It seemed to Rhoda that the house would never grow quiet. As often as she put her head out at the door she could hear some one moving about, or see a glimmer of light through the chink under some door. She grew drowsy, and at length fell asleep with her cheek resting on the cold brass railing of her bed. Awaking with a start, and the troubled consciousness that there was something she was leaving undone, she found that the hands of her little silver watch were pointing to two o'clock. It was quite startling to be up and dressed at two o'clock in the morning! Evening entertainments were of rare occurrence, and early hours the rule at Flying Hill Farm. The house was still enough now. The nibbling of a mouse in the wall made Rhoda jump. That great barn would be a "pokerish" place at this hour. She cast a longing glance at her comfortable little bed, and half resolved

to forego her solitary trip to the barn; but a vision of a pink silk screen—cameo pink, the loveliest shade that ever was seen, the admiration and envy of all the girls—floated again before her eyes and overcame her sleepiness and nervous fears. There was no time to lose; the summer dawn came so early, and Philander was stirring as soon as the first cock crew.

Taking a small brass hand-lamp to light her way, Rhoda stole softly down-stairs. The early morning air was chilly, and as she passed through the hall she caught Cherry's plaid "peasant" cape from the nail where it hung and threw it over her. All the stairs creaked under her careful steps, as stairs will creak when one wishes to make no noise, and the wood-shed was full of startling echoes, that never, to Rhoda's knowledge, had lived there before. And when she pushed the great bolt of the door that led into the barn it made such a noise that she waited, in consternation, to discover whether it had aroused the household.

Her little lamp failed to put to rout the darkness of the great barn. Its feeble beams seemed only to show how great was the darkness, and to start grewsome shadows out of every corner. Rhoda's heart beat quickly. She doubted for a moment whether the precious cameo silk was worth so many unpleasant feelings. But now that she had come she certainly was not going back without it. There was the tin-wagon, with its great rag-bags hanging on behind; it would be an easy matter to explore them. The advent of the light began to create a little stir in the barn. The sleepy cattle turned their heads to look, and Tam the pony whinnied a recognition of the fact that it must be breakfast-time. It shone through the chink of the barn into the poultry-house, and the pert little bantam

rooster, whose aim in life was to give the first signal of morning, set up a shrill cockadoodle-do.

"Oh, if he only would keep still! He'll be sure to wake Philander," murmured Rhoda, rummaging with trembling fingers in the rag-bag.

If the bantam did not wake Philander he certainly did wake some one else. Dilly Gage, whose snug corner of the hay-loft adjoined the poultry-house, started up at the sound of the shrill crow, and becoming conscious that there was a light in the barn, was filled with consternation that she should have overslept until it was morning, and Philander had come to milk the cows. Now she might not be able to slip away unobserved, as she had planned, so that they would think when she appeared to claim her horse and wagon that she had stayed at Mrs. Sally Pitkins's. It seemed to foolish Dilly almost the worst thing that could have befallen her that any one should discover that she had been such a coward (that was what she called herself) as to turn back because of the darkness and the lightning.

She crept softly along towards the edge of the loft, letting the hay rustle just as little as possible, until she could look over into the barn floor.

"My sakes!" thought Dilly, and she was so very much astonished that she almost thought it aloud.

Rhoda had pulled over all the contents of one bag without finding a bit of the pink silk; she had been obliged to take some of the rags out upon the floor in order to make a thorough search, and wisps of hay had become mingled with them, so that it was almost as hard work as patient Griselda had with her feathers to separate them. She felt vexed with Philander for not keeping the barn floor clean, forgetting that the gallery spectators had tossed the hay down, and Phi-



"DILLY CREPT SOFTLY ALONG TOWARDS THE EDGE OF THE LOFT UNTIL SHE COULD LOOK OVER INTO THE BARN FLOOR."

lander had thought it too late to sweep when the Great Exhibition came to an end.

"What can Cherry Eastman want in my rag-bags?" said Dilly to herself, so overcome with astonishment that she was in great danger of forgetting that she must not rustle. Rhoda's back was turned towards her, and she recognized the cape as Cherry's, having often seen her wear it. "She needn't have took the trouble to come out here in the dark like this. I'd have given her anything she wanted, and been glad enough that I had it to give. She's havin' an orfle hard time. I'd like to holler out and tell her it ain't a mite of matter if some hay does get into the bags 'mong the rags. There! she hain't found what she wanted, and if she ain't goin' at the other bag! My land! what an orfle rustlin' I made then! Seems as if she must have heard it."

But Rhoda had at last come upon a piece of the coveted pink silk, and was oblivious, for the moment, of everything else.

"I declare I couldn't stand it to see anybody in this livin' world but jest Cherry Eastman a-rummagin' in my rag-bags like that. Well, if it ain't a piece of that silk that she wanted! She 'pears to be satisfied now. And if she ain't puttin' a piece of silk out of her pocket into the bag in place of it—a bigger piece than what she took out! There! I come as nigh hollerin' out to her that she needn't have done that! How she's hurryin' to fix them bags up again just as they was before! What's the matter? Seems as if she was scairt. She didn't hear me rustlin' then, for I was as still as a mouse."

It was a noise at one of the great outer doors which had startled Rhoda. She listened intently; it might have been the wind. But it came again—a shaking

of the door, which must have been done with hands. As she gazed at the door the great handle turned slowly.

Rhoda caught up her lamp from the floor where she had set it and ran.

"Beats all what scairt her," soliloquized Dilly, leaning out over the loft, but unable to see the door, which, in fact, had now ceased to move.

"It don't seem a mite like Cherry Eastman, anyhow. Why couldn't she say she wanted a piece of that silk when I was tellin' her that I had it? I b'lieve I'm dreamin', it seems so queer. But I've give myself an orfle pinch, and I hain't woke up. Mebbe folks gets light-headed sleepin' in barns. I'll creep back again, anyhow. I don't expect it's much more 'n the middle of the night."

Dilly crept back accordingly to her nest in the hay, and soon fell fast asleep again. The bantam rooster decided that he must have made a mistake, since he had never known the sun to go to bed again after it once got up, and he hurried back to his roost lest he should be jeered at by the old roosters. Footsteps might have been heard to retreat softly from the barn door. Rhoda had gone hurriedly to bed, her heart beating like a drum in her ears. No one knew of the wisp of hay which, caught in a crevice at the side of a stall, had overhung the chimney of Rhoda's lamp until it had crisped and shrivelled, and then reddened to the hue of a live coal; and then, suddenly, fanned by the current of air from the door as Rhoda went out, it had leaped into a tiny thread of flame.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ben had prophesied to Simmy Backup, the very last thing that night, that Phonse would "have that pig on his mind." And Ben was right. Phonse had looked all about the garden and in every available hiding-place for a distracted pig, in the lightning and the rain, but all in vain. "If they would have let him be a pig of course it wouldn't matter so much; he could take care of himself. But now they have got him into such a condition that he doesn't know anything, and because he couldn't do what they wanted him to do when he was frightened to death, they don't care what becomes of him!" he said to himself, indignantly. Phonse went to bed, and although Garibaldi's wrongs lay heavily upon his heart, he also went to sleep. He awoke in the night, or, rather, at almost two o'clock in the morning, and looking out of his window saw that the rain had ceased, and the moon was struggling through the clouds. Down among the cabbages, in the field below the garden, he saw a white shape moving about.

"That's Garibaldi! and he'll spoil all Philander's prize cabbages that he thinks so much of. They'll find out that he's a pig after all! I'd better call Philander."

But on second thoughts Phonse decided to drive the pig out himself. Philander's temper might be ruffled; it would be apt to try the best of dispositions to be obliged to get up in the night to drive a pig out of the prize cabbages; and Philander, who had been much

mortified by what he called "that pesky pig," might frighten or even hurt the poor beast that had already, in Phonse's view, had more trials than a pig should ever be called upon to endure. So Phonse dressed himself hastily, and stole out of the house only a few minutes before Rhoda awoke. It was in fact his closing of the outer door that had awakened her from her light sleep, although she had been unconscious of any noise.

Phonse went through the muddy garden paths, and then over the fence and through the wet grass, only to find that the white shape which he had taken for Garibaldi was a newspaper, blowing about.

"Probably he has gone home to his own barn," thought Phonse, "but I'll just look about our barn and the pigsty a little while, and then I'll go back to bed."

As Phonse approached the barn he saw through the windows a faint light. Was Philander there, with his lantern, at this hour? Had some of the Japanese lanterns been left by accident? Tramps and burglars were unknown to Byerly, but it had been prophesied that they would come with the railroad. It occurred to Phonse as a possibility that one or the other was making his first appearance in their barn. He listened and heard no sound, and then he shook the door to discover whether it was fastened. Then he applied his eye to the great key-hole; the key was turned so that a tiny space was left open, and, directly in range, was a girl's figure stooping over the rag-bags.

"That Dilly Gage!" said Phonse to himself. "What can she be doing with her rags at this time of night? Pulling them out so that they will dry, probably. But how does she happen to be here? They said she went over to old Mrs. Pitkins's to spend the night. She must

have thought better of it and come back, but they should have made her come into the house; that barn isn't a fit place for a girl to stay in all alone."

It did not once occur to Phonse that the girl could be any other than Dilly Gage, since she was emptying Dilly Gage's rag-bags.

He turned towards the house with all thoughts of Garibaldi driven from his mind.

"That girl is always a trouble," he reflected. "I don't think it is at all a proper thing to have her prowling about that barn in the night; she might set something on fire. I wonder what she had for a light. Philander always carries the lanterns into the house. Perhaps I had better go and look again.

Phonse went back, but all was dark and still in the barn. And when he returned he was just too late to see Rhoda's light from the windows as she flew through the house.

"Dilly Gage has probably gone to sleep on the hay," thought Phonse, arriving at one correct conclusion in spite of his mistake.

He returned to his bed, and while he was still reflecting upon Cherry's foolish perversity in believing that a girl from the Roaring Brook settlement could be "made anything of," he fell asleep. The tiny thread of flame flickered and wavered and seemed upon the point of going out, until, suddenly, it reached some loose hay that was hanging from the loft; then in an instant the slender thread became a thousand threads, a leaping flame! It was on Dilly's side of the loft, but Dilly was in the farthest corner. Now it was running swiftly along towards her, and a dense suffocating smoke was filling the barn. Dilly still slept, but she dreamed that Roaring Brook was rising—the danger that they always dreaded—and its waters had rushed in at her window

and over her bed, and she was drowning, and could not make one movement to escape. She wished vaguely that she had not forgotten to say the whole of her verse before she went to sleep, remembering, after the confused fashion of a dream when one is struggling to awake, that she had gone to sleep in the middle of it. Perhaps the water would not have risen if she had said it all:

> "Through life's long day and death's dark night
> Oh, gentle Jesus, be our light!"

She was gasping for breath, the waters were going over her head; she must break the bonds that bound her! She awoke with a blissful sense of relief, and sprang to her feet. But the terrible suffocating sensation was no dream. A heavy black cloud of smoke shut her in, she could feel the heat of the flames that were sweeping towards her. To rush anywhere out of the smoke was Dilly's first impulse, but she was not so terrified as to be bereft of her reasoning faculties. Dilly was possessed of some of the coolness of brain which is available in an emergency. To go forward was to fall off the loft. The smoke seemed less dense in that direction, but it would be hopeless to try to find the ladder.

The opening into the stall below, through which she had come up, seemed the safer way of escape, if she could only find it in the blackness before her breath was gone. She groped upon her hands and knees; here it was, nearer than she had hoped, and a faint glimmer of light showed her the window. She swung herself over the opening and kicked at the window with all her might. A blessed breath of air followed the breaking of the glass; she tried to break the sash away but in vain. The heavy smoke rolled up in waves

from below. It was now as dense on the floor of the barn as it was above.

"Oh, the poor creatures!" thought Dilly. "If I could save any of them!"

But to save her own life was the only possibility now, and that seemed but a doubtful one. She reached out and caught at the broken sash, and clung to it with all her weight. It slipped down from the top, and with one last effort Dilly climbed out of the opening and dropped. She expected that she should be killed, but to escape from that torturing suffocation she must risk anything. She came down gently upon some soft hay. But the smoke pursued her; she could hear the crackling of flames near her. A noise of frightened, cackling hens told her that she was in the poultry-house, and she made her way blindly to the door, opened it, and rushed out in the midst of what seemed a whirlwind of wings. In her bewilderment she ran on; she could not feel sure that she was out of reach of the terrible fire.

It was Philander who had first discovered that the barn was on fire. He could not tell what had awakened him, but declared his belief that it was "a presentiment." He smelled smoke and heard the crackling and roaring of the fire. Looking out of his window, he saw flames leaping out through the roof of the barn.

Philander had strong lungs, and he made them serve him now. He screamed "Fire! fire!" to such purpose that the whole household was stirring in a moment. They heard the cry over at Deacon Backup's, and Dr. Clinch, the little horse-doctor, heard it in his house at the foot of the hill, and it was not long before its echoes reached the village; and the new chemical engine, the pride and delight of Byerly boys, was on its way up

the hill—not long, but the fire was swift; it had made great headway before Philander had discovered it.

They got the frightened animals out. Tam, the pony, wild with terror, rushed back into the fire and was rescued with difficulty. The bear broke away from Ben and made a bee-line for the woods. Philander got the carriages out of the carriage-house, and moved Dilly Gage's tin-wagon far out of reach of the fire. There were valuable tools in the tool-house, but that was a sheet of flame. The wind blew the flames towards the house, and already the roof of the wood-shed was on fire. Squire Brewster and Deacon Backup were up there with buckets of water.

Uncle David had called out to Philander to let the barn go and try to save the house, when Phonse, who had been the last to appear, but had worked with a will to save the animals, rushed by Philander with a horror-stricken face and into the burning barn.

"Come back! come back!" shouted Philander. "There ain't anything livin' there now, and you couldn't save it if there was. If that pesky pig was there, why, he's pork!"

"That girl, Dilly Gage, is there!" cried Phonse.

"No, she ain't; she went over acrost the field to old Miss Sally Pitkin's."

"I tell you she's there; I saw her there in the night! I think she's up on the hay."

Phonse rushed through the blinding smoke to the ladder, and half-way up. Above him the hay-loft was in flames. The ladder wavered and fell, and burning beams came down with it. Philander, at the risk of his life, lifted Phonse from the burning ruins, and rushed with him into the air.

"That was jest as nigh as could be to throwin' away your life," he said, severely. "I ain't noways sure that

that girl would be worth it if she was there, which she couldn't be, noway, for I fastened the doors myself last night, after I saw her go off acrost the field."

"Some way a fellow wouldn't exactly expect that of Phonse," Simmy Backup was confiding to Ben. "We've always thought he was—well, not exactly a 'fraid cat, perhaps, but a sort of softy, you know."

"Good land of nater! there's them fowls, that I clean forgot! Nobody hain't thought of them, poor creturs! I b'lieve I be nigh about crazy," cried Philander, "but somebody's opened the door, for there they be flyin' out! There's somebody runnin' away as fast as they can run!"

Philander ran to a spot where the light of the fire fell full upon the retreating figure. "It's a girl! It's Dilly Gage!" he cried. "Well, if I ain't beat! How came she here?"

But there was no time to talk or to wonder. Every one was pressed into service to protect the house, or to remove valuables to a place of safety. Loveday was dressing Phonse's hands, which were badly burned, as well as she could, in the excitement. The fire had communicated to the back part of the house, but now the little chemical engine had arrived and was worked with a will.

The fire was extinguished at length, and the main body of the house was saved, but the ell and one wing were gone. It was a dreary ruin that the cheerful morning sun looked down upon, and a family that felt homeless and forlorn gathered in the sitting-room, which was filled with a hopeless confusion of things saved from the ruins, chiefly in a water-soaked condition. It was evident that Uncle David felt his loss keenly, although he said more than once that he was thankful that so much was saved. And Loveday talked

cheerfully about Providence, but with a lump in her throat.

Ben and Simmy Backup had gone in search of the bear, accompanied by Mr. Pringle, his keeper, who had appeared at the barn in a state of great anxiety before the fire was extinguished, He evidently blamed himself very much for intrusting the bear to the boys' keeping, and the latter learned that Captain Jack possessed a money value which seemed to them extraordinarily large.

"I thought of fetchin' him away after you got through with him last night," said Mr. Pringle, who had witnessed the Great Exhibition from a reserved seat. "But it was rainin' so hard, and I calc'lated that he'd be full as safe and comfortable in your barn as he would down to the hotel in the village, where there wa'n't anything but a shed to put him in. Oh, I expect we shall find him," he added, in response to Ben's confident assurance. "But, I tell you, there ain't nothin' like a scare to bring out wild beast nater!"

Garibaldi had been found in a very draggled condition, and minus his scarlet ribbon at the door of his own barn, and Simmy, with melancholy firmness, had consigned him to the sty with the other pigs!

Phonse was forgetting the pain of his burns in mourning over the burning of his pigeon-houses and the flight of his pigeons, which had gone no one knew whither, and the homelessness of the swallows that had lived in the eaves of the barn. He received with an impatient frown any reference to his efforts to save Dilly Gage at the risk of his own life.

"I must say Phonse has surprised me," remarked Uncle David, when Phonse had left the room. "I wouldn't have believed that it was in him to do so brave a thing as that."

"I expect there's more to Phonse than anybody knows of," said Loveday. "And what with one thing and another happenin' this summer, what there is in him has been comin' out fast."

Phonse had gone out to look for Corny Buttercup, the yellow kitten, who always preferred the barn to her cretonne-lined basket in the sitting-room. Phonse feared that she had been burned in the barn, but Cherry was of the opinion that her objection to the bear had driven her away. And Cherry's opinion was soon proved to be the correct one, by the discovery of Corny Buttercup sitting on the blackened ruins of the porch, mewing piteously.

"Oh, isn't it horrid, Corny?" said Cherry, sympathetically, as she carried the cat in her arms into the sitting-room. "I know I feel just as a cat does about familiar places. To think that we shall never sit on that porch under the hop-vine again!"

"We shall have a new porch, and a new vine," said Rhoda. She was looking pale and hollow-eyed, but no one thought that strange after the excitement of the fire.

"And the dear old kitchen, where we've made caramels and corn-balls, and I put nitre instead of vanilla into my first pudding! I shall always think that Ben changed the bottles on purpose. And Philander has told such lovely stories; I remember the very first evening he was here, and when we were so little we used to quarrel for turns to heat the poker for grandpa's mug of cider."

"And Rhoda always had the most turns," said Phonse, who was stroking the kitten into a state of serenity.

"We shall have a new kitchen—a better one," said Rhoda, ignoring Phonse's accusation.

"And the peacock room over the kitchen," pursued Cherry. "I loved those peacocks on the paper; and the closet with the yellow curtain where we kept the bags of nuts, and the 'rising-sun' bedquilt that we all cried to have over us when we had the measles! Oh, it is too much that the rising-sun bedquilt is burned!"

"That was a dreadfully funny, old-fashioned looking room. Angie Wallace laughed at it the night I had my birthday party," said Rhoda.

"I think it was a beautiful room," said Cherry. "And the back stairs are gone, with the pictures that we pasted on where the paper was torn—"

"They looked dreadfully shabby. I think it will be ever so much better to have things new and stylish," said Rhoda.

"Shabby or not, it was all home; we never, never can get it back again!" cried Cherry. "And that lovely old barn! I can't trust myself to think of that."

"It wasn't in keeping with the house," said Rhoda. "It wasn't even painted the same color. I was always ashamed of it. It looked so badly when one first came in sight of the farm."

"Oh, what does paint matter?" cried Cherry. "You can't paint good times! But you could see and feel them all over that barn! I *loved* it ugly."

"I like to have things handsome and new and—and like other people's," insisted Rhoda. (In spite of the difference between them, Rhoda and Dilly Gage thought alike about some things.) "But I'm sorry that it will cost so much to rebuild; will it cost so very much, papa?"

Rhoda's smooth brow was ruffled with anxiety, as no one had ever seen it.

Her father did not answer. His face wore an impatient frown as he paced up and down through the room and the great hall that ran through the house. "I'll tell you what it is, dear," said Loveday, when he was out of hearing. "The insurance had just run out. I know, because I heard him say to Deacon Backup yesterday that he must attend to it. 'Twa'n't like the squire to neglect a thing like that, and I expect he blames himself. That's why he don't like to say much about it. He's had a sight of business troubles, what with the railroad and all, and I expect that's what made him forget the insurance. What's puzzlin' me is how ever it come to get afire! Philander's so cautious that I can't never believe but what he left everything safe there. There's every one of them Japanese lanterns up in the hall closet, where I put 'em when he fetched 'em in last night, and not one of 'em is so much as scorched. I heard folks sayin' it might have been them; but it couldn't have been, anyhow."

Rhoda said nothing. She wondered why she had heard no more questionings as to the origin of the fire. She had a guilty feeling that some one must suspect that she had been in the barn with a lamp. She remembered that there had been hay about on the floor and hanging from the loft near the place where she had set her lamp, and she had heard Deacon Backup say that the fire must have caught or been set long after the show was over, because it was not discovered until after half-past two o'clock, and it could not have smouldered among such inflammable material all that time. She felt almost certain that her lamp had set the fire. She had felt so nervous and hurried that she had been careless in tossing the wisps of hay about as she picked them out of the rags. She had not once thought of the danger of fire. Was it her

duty to tell what she had done? It could make no difference now. And it was only an accident. She had been careless, but that was not a crime that one need to confess it. And it would be very unpleasant to explain why she had gone to the barn. "A fair exchange was no robbery," according to one of Loveday's favorite proverbs, but to help herself out of Dilly Gage's rag-bags was, as she knew she would have said, if Cherry had been the author of the mischief, "not at all a nice thing to do." And Rhoda had an extreme sensitiveness to blame. Was not she the proper and well-behaved one who always felt a right to blame the others? It seemed quite incongruous; it was unendurable to Rhoda that she should be to blame.

If Philander should be accused of carelessness, then it might be her duty to acknowledge what she had done, or if any one should be suspected of setting the fire; but otherwise Rhoda decided that she might keep silence as to her possible share in the matter. And, after all, it was only a possible share; probably it could never be known with certainty what had caused the fire. Most people had seemed to regard it as a natural result of the show; some had shaken their heads wisely, and said they wondered at the time that Squire Brewster should have allowed those boys to have Japanese lanterns there where there was so much hay. Her secret was quite safe, thought Rhoda. Even if Dilly Gage should discover that she had a piece of blue silk in her bag instead of pink, which was very unlikely, she would never guess how the exchange had been effected. She had felt a little uneasy about the noise she had heard at the barn door—it had sounded so very much like footsteps—but now she had concluded that it was possible that she had been deceived by her nervous fears. That great barn had been an uncanny place in the dead of the

night; a piece of pink silk, even though it were cameo pink, was scarcely worth what she had gone through to obtain it, to say nothing of the fire. But then she might have heard footsteps. Some incendiary might have been lurking about even then. It was really not very likely that she was to blame for the fire.

When she had reasoned herself into this belief the color began to come back to Rhoda's face, and she could assent with some heartiness to the suggestion with which Cherry was trying to console herself, that "it was going to be some fun, anyway, to go to Deacon Backup's to breakfast." Philander came and stood outside the window, resting his folded arms upon the sill. Philander was apt to do this when he had something important to communicate to Squire Brewster.

"Beats all how Dilly Gage got back into that barn last night! She was possessed to go over to Mis' Sally Pitkin's. Nothin' wouldn't stop her. I see her a-scuddin' over the field; I expect it was just another one of their tricks! They're an awful lot and no mistake, them Gages: she must have slipped in there just as quick as folks turned their backs; we wa'n't more'n half an hour a-gettin' things to rights, and then I locked the doors; there wa'n't a nook nor a cranny that she could have crept in by after that."

Phonse dropped Corny Buttercup and started to his feet, as if struck by a sudden idea.

"I saw her there in the night! It was about two o'clock. I thought I saw Garibaldi in the cabbages, and I went out. I saw a light in the barn and I looked through the key-hole. She was doing something with her rag-bags. She had a light. I went back to see what kind of a light it was, but the barn was all dark then."

Philander had pursed up his lips in a long whistle.

"That's just what I thought, only I wa'n't a-goin' to say it without more proof!" he said, in a triumphant tone.

"Say what, Philander?" It was Rhoda who said it, in a faint voice.

"It was Dilly Gage that sot the barn a-fire!" said Philander.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Dilly Gage sot the barn afire, and she come slinkin' back there after she'd made believe she was goin' over to Mis' Sally Pitkin's, on purpose to do it!" continued Philander. "Ain't it just what might be expected of them Gages? Ain't they got a spite against the squire, and more partickerley since 'twas our folks that found 'em out? They're just as ignorant as savages, them Roarin' Brook folks, and that girl is a reg'lar limb."

"But her horse and wagon were there, Philander," said Squire Brewster. "I don't think it likely that she would have sacrificed everything she had in the world to spite us."

Philander took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair until it stood upright. This was the way in which Philander always showed great perplexity.

"I ain't a-goin' to say that I didn't let that horse of hers out," he said, "for I didn't more'n half know what I was about when I tore in through the smoke after them creturs. I ain't a-goin' to say that I didn't, but the first I see of him he was 'way down to the end of the south medder. I never see him 'mong the other horses! I jest run 'em into the paster, and there they stayed. He might have jumped the fence; I ain't a-goin' to say he didn't. They was all of 'em scairt enough to do it.

It's my idee that she let him out herself before the fire broke out. And as for her wagon, she's got a terrible short stock of tin-ware on it. I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' more'n what can be proved, but I never see so little on that tin-wagon as I see this mornin'. And what was she runnin' away for, like all possessed? She sent one of them Bumpus boys after her team. She never told him she'd been in the barn. She never told him but what she'd been to home all night. She just told him that she left her horse and wagon here because 'twas rainin' hard. He said she looked awful pale, and said she wa'n't able to come up here herself."

Philander had told his story with an eager haste that bore down all interruption. Cherry had uttered several indignant protests. Rhoda felt herself growing red and white by turns, and was glad that no one observed her. Uncle David continued his monotonous pacing, but listened intently. Loveday stood in the door-way with her arms akimbo, and occasionally said, "Well, I never!" in evident acceptance of Philander's theory.

It was very trying to Cherry that although Loveday had so keen an insight into character where their own family circle was concerned, and confidently believed that the good in every one of them was strong enough to get the better of the bad, she never would believe any good of Dilly Gage. "When you've lived as long as I have, dearie," she would say, "you'll know how little dependence can be put on them Roarin' Brook folks." Every one was going to believe, Cherry thought, with indignant wonder, that Dilly Gage was bad enough to do such a terrible thing as that. But no!—

"I can't really believe the girl did it," said Uncle David. "But it is certainly a queer piece of business.

I don't understand what she can have been doing with a light in the barn at two o'clock in the morning."

"She seemed to be pulling over her rags. There was a heap of them on the barn floor," said Phonse.

"You should have awakened some one and told of it," said Uncle David. "You know that no one but Philander is ever allowed to have a light in the barn."

"It was out in a minute or two," said Phonse. "And everything was as quiet as could be."

"Could anything—would anything be done to her for it?" Rhoda asked, in a voice that trembled in spite of her strong effort to keep it steady.

"I don't know how you can believe such things!" cried Cherry, tumultuously. "Dilly never did it, never! She would no more do such a thing than—than Rhoda would!"

Cherry had almost said "than *I* would," but had used Rhoda's name instead, as representing virtue much more strongly.

"I don't know why you should say that," faltered Rhoda, looking startled. "I am sure no one would think of my setting a fire — on purpose. It's quite absurd to compare me to Dilly Gage in that way."

"No one ought to think of Dilly Gage's doing it," said Cherry, stoutly.

"*I* don't think she did it," said Rhoda, but with a little hesitation. "Will she be accused of it? Could it be proved that she did it, do you think?" Rhoda's questions were not answered, for at that moment good Deacon Backup appeared at the door, with a cheerful remonstrance at their delay, and the information that the coffee and the cakes were being spoiled by waiting. It seemed strange that there was a cheerful morning world of coffee and cakes wagging on its accustomed way. Rhoda said she thought she would not go to

Deacon Backup's; she didn't care for any breakfast. Her father insisted, however; people could not be allowed to make themselves ill in these trying times, he said. Would they talk about Dilly Gage and the probable cause of the fire all breakfast-time? Rhoda felt as if she could not endure it.

Kindly Mrs. Backup had got out her best china, used only on state occasions, and with all the delicacies she could think of had done her best to give a cheerful air to the breakfast; but with all her pains she was not very successful. Uncle David was not a man who responded very readily to sympathy, or who knew how to disguise his feelings; perhaps with such good friends and neighbors he did not feel it to be necessary to do the latter. Cherry chattered as if she had been brought up in ignorance of the old adage that children should be seen and not heard, although, in truth, grandma, in her time, had enforced it faithfully. She felt a nervous eagerness to keep the conversation from turning to the subject of that dreadful suspicion about Dilly Gage. It was no matter what any one thought of her, if she could keep them from talking about Dilly Gage and her possible connection with the fire. Uncle David would not do it, she thought, nor Phonse, but it would be just like Rhoda; and Lizy Ann, the hired girl who waited upon the table, was a great gossip.

If she had known that Rhoda was even more anxious than she to avoid that subject, Cherry would have found more of a flavor in coffee and cakes and lamb-chops. Mrs. Backup was worrying, in hospitable Byerly fashion, because Rhoda could not eat.

"Rhoda looks as if she felt it more than any of you," she said. "I never thought you were so delicate, Rhoda."

"It was such a dreadful thing, you know," Cherry

broke in, with her nervous haste. "I suppose fashionable city people would care very little about losing their kitchen and their stables, but to us they were the very *homeiest* part. Rhoda thinks she shall like new things, but she'll find that the new barn won't have the old high beam in it that she walked across when Jacky Batterson dared her. Such a little thing as she was, but just as *determined!*"

Uncle David interrupted Cherry's chatter by asking Deacon Backup his opinion about plans and workmen for the new ell and barn, which must be begun as soon as the ruins could be cleared away.

At one moment Rhoda assured herself that nothing more would be said about Dilly Gage in connection with the fire, and then, as she tried to believe, no harm would have been done to her. At another moment she thought that Philander, whose voice could be heard from the kitchen, where Lizy Ann was regaling him with hot coffee, was telling her all his suspicions. Everybody in Byerly would know all about it soon. Dilly Gage would be arrested and tried, perhaps sentenced to prison. Oh, why had she not acknowledged at first that it was she whom Phonse had seen in the barn? Then it would have been comparatively easy; it would have been mortifying, and she would have been blamed; that had seemed unendurable then. Now every one would know that she had hesitated; that she had preferred to have Dilly Gage suspected of a crime rather than to admit that she had taken liberties with Dilly Gage's rag-bags, and had been careless.

Rhoda's nerves were tried by the excitements of the night; with this struggle of conscience added to them, she began to feel as if she were in a feverish dream; the green roses of the wall-paper, the pattern of the table-cloth, the little purple wheels upon Mrs. Backup's

cambric dress, seemed to her for long afterwards like objects seen in a nightmare.

It was a relief when Simmy and Ben came bursting in, fresh from their search for the bear, and relating their adventures in chorus. They had found Captain Jack in the Roaring Brook woods, apparently making for the old logging-camp, where he had before found refuge. He had greeted them with demonstrations of joy, and had allowed them to lead him back until they came in sight of the ruins of the barn. Then he had broken away from them in terror, and it had been difficult to recapture him. When at last they succeeded Mr. Pringle took charge of him, and was to take him back to Belford by the road that led along the foot of Tumble Down Hill.

"He said he didn't mind going that roundabout way," explained Ben, "because he wanted to call on Dilly Gage. She was a favorite of his when she was little. She was 'as good as gold,' and 'as smart as a steel trap,' and had had an orfle hard time. He said you couldn't make him believe that she knew what her scamp of a father was up to."

Cherry drew a long sigh of satisfaction.

"I knew that Mr. Pringle was a nice man the moment I saw him," she said.

"Those Roaring Brook people are clannish. They always stand by each other," said Uncle David.

"But Mr. Pringle isn't a Roaring Brook person at all," cried Cherry. "He lived for a little while at the foot of Tumble Down Hill, on the other side of the bridge."

Uncle David took no notice whatever of this communication.

"I pity that Dilly Gage," said good Mrs. Backup. "She can never have had any good influences. She

must be very shrewd for so young a girl, or she could not have helped her father carry out his deceit."

"She didn't," said Cherry. "He deceived her as well as other people. She was as surprised as could be, and felt awfully when he was found out."

"Cherry is Dilly Gage's avowed champion," said Uncle David.

"Perhaps she really didn't help him. It is so easy you know to—to be mistaken about people."

It was Rhoda who said this, speaking with an evident effort, and with a bright red spot in each of her cheeks. Cherry looked at her with surprise and gratitude; it was something new, indeed, for Rhoda to come to Dilly Gage's defence; and people always listened to Rhoda more than to her.

The boys' minds were too full of the bear to allow them to listen patiently to talk of less important matters. Ben interrupted the comment upon Dilly Gage to announce that there were tears in Simmy's eyes when they took leave of Captain Jack. "A fellow couldn't help it. I felt as if I should be willing to be a girl for a minute or two myself. To see that splendid old fellow come back two or three times to shake hands with us! And we had to run, and Mr. Pringle had to drag him, or he never could have got him to leave us."

"I'm going to save up to buy a bear," said Simmy, pathetically. "*They* have some brains." (This was understood to be an allusion to Garibaldi, but every one had too much regard for the boys' feelings to mention him.)

Little Caleb, who had been amusing himself with a piece of paper and a pencil, brought it to Rhoda for her admiration. It was so nondescript a figure as to be quite perplexing if little Caleb had not considerately

printed the explanation beneath it, thus: "THIS IZ A PIRUT HIM SET THE BARN AFIRE."

Rhoda spelled it aloud with difficulty, not thinking that even little Caleb was to touch her wound.

"'Twasn't a pirate, 'twas a girl," cried Ben. "Did you honestly see Dilly Gage there with a light in the middle of the night, Phonse? Philander was just telling us. Well, Cherry, I think you must have had about enough of trying to make something of that girl. I wonder what Mr. Pringle will say now."

Even Ben, who was usually generous and considerate, was ready to believe anything evil of Dilly Gage, thought Cherry, and her heart burned within her. But of what use was it to defend Dilly while circumstances were so cruelly against her?

It was Uncle David who came to the rescue with the request that the matter should be kept quiet. "It seems probable that Dilly Gage set the fire," he said, "but I don't think she did it intentionally. At all events, we will be sure not to accuse her unjustly. I ought to have cautioned Philander not to spread the report."

Rhoda drew a long breath. Here was a reprieve, at least. If Dilly Gage were to be accused of nothing more than carelessness it would be a small matter. And since she had spent the night in the barn—Philander had seen her running away in the midst of the fire—who could say that she had not set the fire? But just as Rhoda's spirits were rising a little with this reflection a new thought made her almost start from her seat in dismay. Dilly Gage had been in the barn when she was there; it was probable, or at least possible, that she had been a witness of the raid upon her rag-bags! If that possibility had occurred to her at first she certainly would not have hesitated to confess her possible

share in the mischief. Oh, why had she not thought of it?

She rose abruptly from the table, and begging to be excused, in a voice that trembled in spite of all her efforts, she ran homeward.

"She is worn out by the excitement; a little rest will set her right," said Mrs. Backup, wisely.

"I didn't think she minded much at first," said Cherry, wonderingly. "She seemed to think so much of having new things."

"She was 'fraid of my pirut," said little Caleb, proudly. "I make 'em orfle. I made one so bad that I ran and hollered for mother, and after I went to bed I kept thinking of him. But they won't hurt you," he added, with reassuring kindness, to Cherry.

But it was Pirate Conscience who was making Rhoda pale, and one can escape more easily from all the ogres in Christendom than from him.

"Land sake, child! it ain't any use to take it so hard," Loveday had called after her, as she fled in haste. "When troubles come we must put our trust in Providence."

"There are no troubles—never any in the world," murmured Rhoda, desperately, under her breath, as she ran up-stairs to her own room, "except being bad."

Meanwhile Dilly Gage, sitting on her door-step in the morning sunshine, waiting for the sweet fresh air to overcome the pain and giddiness that were the results of the nervous shock and the suffocation which she had endured, saw 'Lando Bumpus returning from Flying Hill Farm with her horse and wagon. She had not known before whether they were safe. She had felt giddy and bewildered when she escaped, and had run on and on with no purpose except to get away as far as possible from the fire. She had been keenly

anxious about the fate of her horse and of her wagon before she reached home, but had felt too weak and ill to go back. It was a great relief to see 'Lando bringing them home safe. It was pleasant, too, to reflect that those people need never know that she had been so lacking in bravery, after all, as to turn back and sleep in their barn.

"I don't want 'em to know that I am beholden to 'em for as much as a night's shelter, anyway," she said to herself. "If it had been Cherry Eastman's barn, why, I wouldn't have cared a mite."

"I had an orfle job to catch that horse, he was so scared," remarked 'Lando, as soon as he came within speaking distance. "Why didn't you tell me you was in that barn? You must have come near bein' burned to death. That hired man there, he see you runnin' away when 'twas all ablaze. One of them boys, the one they call Phonse, knew you was there, and he tried to get you out. He tried to get up onto the loft when 'twas all afire. The loft gave way and the ladder come down. He was burned consid'able, and they're makin' a sight of fuss about him for bein' brave. I expect it *was* plucky for a soft-lookin' feller like him."

"Phonse! I wouldn't have believed he would have tried to save *me!* Maybe he didn't know who it was that was up there," faltered Dilly, with a softened look in her face. "But there! I guess he'd have done it for anybody. He felt bad about my poor old Jane. But—but—how did he know there was anybody up there?"

"He peeked in through a chink or something in the barn-door, 'long about two o'clock in the morning, and he see you there with a light ransackin' your rag-bags. He was lookin' after a pig that had got into the cabbages, and he see a light in the barn; that's how he come to look."

A flush had risen to the roots of Dilly's tow-colored hair.

"He never! 'Twa'n't me!" she cried, with much of her old fierceness; and then her manner changed suddenly. "I—I mean I didn't want 'em to know that I slept there, because I started to go over to old Mis' Sally Pitkin's, and then I got scairt and went back, and I was ashamed of it."

'Lando looked at her keenly, pausing in the act of alighting from the tin-wagon.

"'Cordin' to the hired man, they're a-calc'latin' up there—they're a-calc'latin' *pretty strong* that 'twas you that set the barn afire!"

"Me set the barn afire?" she echoed, excitedly.

"The hired man, he said you might have done it accidental, but everybody knew you had an uncommon strong grudge against 'em. And he says you must have fetched in some kind of a light, for there wa'n't any left in the barn."

Dilly said nothing; she seemed to be reflecting deeply, and 'Lando continued, evidently to gratify some curiosity of his own:

"Didn't happen to have a lantern, or a lamp, or anything 'mongst the tin-ware, did you?"

"I never set fire to anything, accidental nor a purpose," she said. "But folks can say just what they're a mind to. Seems as if they never would let me alone! I *be* discouraged."

"If you could prove that you hadn't any light, now, nor any matches, why, you could catch 'em. Them lawyers are sharp, but I tell you they can't get ahead of facts," said 'Lando, with the air of being strong in legal lore. "But there! 'tain't as if you hadn't been to court once; you'll know how to manage."

To court? Would it come to that? Would they



"'LANDO BUMPUS AND DILLY DISCUSS THE SITUATION."

arrest her? Dilly felt a numbness of terror stealing over her. Her head had grown more dizzy; it was hard to think.

How things had changed since that June morning when she went to court! She had been full of defiance, and of a sure expectation of triumphing over her enemies. Now, this very morning, she had been thinking that perhaps they were not her enemies after all. They had not said that they did not believe in her. She had thought that perhaps she had been too hasty in assuming that it was so. Many people in the village showed her by a studied avoidance or severe looks that they believed her to be a partner in her father's deceit; some few manifested a kindly feeling that they had never shown before. But now her rising hope about the people at Flying Hill Farm was dashed to the ground. They could believe her guilty of such wickedness as that! They would always be against her.

"Let 'em do what they're a mind to, if it's to put me into jail!" said Dilly to herself, despairingly. "I can't never get to be like folks."

And Cherry—had Cherry heard Phonse say that it was she whom he had seen with a light emptying the rag-bags? Surely Cherry would acknowledge the truth rather than to allow her to be accused! It was very queer, indeed, that Cherry should have wished to go to her rag-bags in the middle of the night. 'Lando had gone away, after feeding the horse and doing many little acts of neighborly kindness, for which Dilly was too dejected to thank him.

She emptied her rag-bags and looked their contents all over. "She put something in, and she took something out; it looked like a piece of them bridesmaid's pink silk she took out, but I can't make out anything

about it. She acted terrible sly. Mebbe 'twas something that she didn't want anybody to know of. It didn't seem a mite like Cherry Eastman, anyhow. I guess she'll tell when she knows that they think 'twas me. I don't see how she can help it. If she don't it must be something that she feels awful anxious to keep folks from knowin'."

There was a rustling in the woods path, which led into the road very near the house, and two shapes emerged into the road, Mr. Pringle and the bear.

Dilly's troubled heart felt a thrill of hope. Mr. Pringle was her friend, and he had not forgotten her. But her thoughts reverted to Cherry Eastman even in the brief space of time before he reached her door.

"I guess she'll tell; seems as if she must. But, anyhow, I couldn't bear to tell of her, I know I couldn't. Nobody else in this livin' world ever treated me as if I was like folks. No matter what they do to me, I'll never tell that 'twas her!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"It was splendid of you, Phonse. I don't know of another boy who would have been so brave," said Cherry, the more heartily, perhaps, because she had almost forgotten Phonse and his painful burns in her anxiety about the new trouble that threatened Dilly Gage. Only a little while ago to help Phonse, and sympathize with him, so far as she could, had seemed her only mission in life. Now she had begun to discover that so much helpfulness was needed in the world that there was no longer any danger of her "making a mollycoddle of Phonse," as Ben had said. Moreover,

Phonse had grown more manly; the trouble about the railroad case had made a striking change in him. He had not been quite "straightforward" in his testimony, he had not told what Chissy Fenwick had said. As things had turned out, it had not mattered much. Cherry wondered whether if that day were to be lived over again, even with no knowledge of the results, Phonse would not tell. She thought he would. He received her praise with a scowl. He had not changed so much but that he was still exactly like Phonse.

"That girl is always making a bother," he said, gruffly. "Of course a fellow would go if anything alive were up there, if it were nothing but the bantam rooster."

Phonse had thought at first that all his pets were safe; the fan-tailed pigeons had come flying home from all directions; but he had discovered later in the day that one of them was missing. He had only just found it, at noon of the second day after the fire, in possession of Mrs. Sally Pitkin's little granddaughter, who was still figuring in the yellow night-gown, and had recovered it only by means of a quite magnificent bribe—five Bartlett pears, and a molasses cooky, a bright penny with a hole in it, a string of purple glass beads, and two resplendent feathers from a rooster's tail. Cherry had shown her diplomatic talent by producing these offerings after all Phonse's negotiations had failed, she of the yellow night-gown being a most obstinate and covetous person.

Now, Phonse was happy in the possession of all his pigeons, but had found that the eyes of one of his rabbits were seriously affected, and its ear actually singed. He was bathing both the eyes and the ear of the unfortunate rabbit with hamamelis carefully diluted, and Cherry, watching the operation, said to herself, "He

thinks so much of that rabbit, and not at all of poor Dilly Gage and her troubles!"

It happened at that very moment that Phonse looked up from the rabbit, and said: "Uncle David is going to send for that girl. I heard him talking about it with Deacon Backup. He wants to know what she has to say for herself. He said he should be glad, for his own sake, to let the matter drop, but he thought it was his duty to investigate it. He said if Dilly Gage had done such a thing as that, it would be the best thing that could happen to her to be sent to a reformatory institution."

"Oh, oh!" cried Cherry, in a horrified tone.

"Especially as she hadn't any one to look after her, and has always been under such bad influences. Loveday said she had heard that her mother was a good woman, but she died when Dilly was a baby. Uncle David is very much vexed because they're talking about it all over town. He says Philander ought not to have mentioned it. When Philander gets excited, as he was after the fire, he hasn't much sense. And he is so sensitive about having it said that he wasn't careful about the lanterns! he always is, you know; he's orfly fussy. There's never been a lantern left in that barn overnight since he has lived here. I suppose that girl thought it was a good chance, because every one would say that the fire caught from the Japanese lanterns. Don't you remember that she threatened to pay us up, that day of the trial?"

"She—she is quite different from that now," said Cherry.

"It isn't so very long ago. And that girl has more reason to have a grudge against us than she had then."

Phonse had come to have a pride in his discovery of the old tin-peddler's fraud. Every one questioned him

about it, and he had related the circumstances over and over again, laying aside his usual reticence. He told just how Dilly had behaved, without expressing any opinion concerning her share in the deceit, but that reserve was for Cherry's sake. "She would persist in being such a goose about that girl," he said to himself. He had no doubt whatever about her guilt—a girl who was capable of making up faces! Phonse's keen artistic objection to anything that was ugly to look at influenced his opinion of Dilly Gage more than he realized. Dilly was not pretty, at the best, and her facility for distorting her face into grotesque and hideous shapes was certainly unusual. It was only a mild expression of sentiment in Roaring Brook society. It was only since Cherry had shown a friendly interest in her that Dilly had begun to realize that it was not "like folks" to make faces.

To send Dilly to a reformatory institution! It had too dreadful a sound to be true. Uncle David's silence about the matter had led her to hope that the cruel suspicions were to be forgotten. She had not heard before that they were talking about it all over town, because she had stayed closely at home, helping to take care of the household treasures that had been water-soaked and tossed about in the confusion of the fire, and taking a little care of Rhoda, too, for Rhoda had been ill, nervous and feverish, from the excitement and unusual exposure to the chilly morning air, the doctor said.

"They mustn't do it! they can't do it!" cried Cherry, hotly. And then she rushed away and into the sitting-room, where Rhoda lay, looking very pale, on the red cretonne-covered sofa. "Oh, Rhoda, do you think Uncle David will have Dilly Gage sent to a reformatory institution? It would kill her!"

Rhoda sprang up, and her white cheeks were suddenly as red as the sofa.

"Oh, no, no! he mustn't! We must coax him not to!" she cried.

Cherry looked at her gratefully. Rhoda was wiser when she was ill, she thought; she seemed to have more feeling for others.

"You coax him; you tell him that you don't think she did it," said Cherry, eagerly. "He will listen so much more to you!" It was new and delightful to have Rhoda for an ally. Cherry felt an added assurance that her cause must be just.

"It seems to me that every one listens more to you, lately," said Rhoda, with a touch of grievance in her tone. "And I—I don't know what I can say. She *was* in the barn, and why did she run away?"

"I suppose she was frightened and almost suffocated. Any one would have been likely to run away. If you think she did it—"

"I don't think she did," said Rhoda, but rather faintly. "I think it is *possible* that she did, but I don't think she ought to be sent to a reform-school, or punished in any way, when it can't be proven. I don't think there's any danger that she will be. You're so excitable, Cherry! I wish you wouldn't startle me so."

Rhoda lay back upon her cushions, looking peevish and miserable.

"I didn't think it would startle you. I didn't think you would care very much whether she were sent to a reform-school or not. I thought you would say, 'Perhaps it would be the best thing for her.'"

"Well, perhaps it would!" cried Rhoda, desperately. "I am tired to death of Dilly Gage. I don't see why we need to have so much trouble about her. If

you hadn't asked her to stay to the bear-show this wouldn't have happened."

"I'm sure I wish I hadn't. But she never has any good times, and I thought we might give her one little bit of a one as well as not," said Cherry.

"It's well enough, of course, to give food and clothes to those Roaring Brook people, but when you try to treat them as if they were like—like other people, you see how much trouble comes of it."

Rhoda was Rhoda, after all; there was no help to be looked for in that direction, thought Cherry, and was going away in silence—unless a slight emphasis of her boot-heels must be counted—when Rhoda's voice stopped her.

"If there should be any danger, I—I shall tell papa that I don't approve of it," said Rhoda, in her grand manner.

Cherry's impulse was to go to Uncle David and "coax him," as Rhoda had suggested at first, when she was "startled"; but a second thought convinced her that that would be useless. Uncle David was seldom coaxable; he would certainly not be so when he had, as Phonse reported, "felt it to be his duty to investigate the matter." Perhaps, after all, it would be better that he should see and question Dilly Gage; her honest, straightforward manner could not fail to impress him, thought Cherry. She wished she could go down to Roaring Brook and try to comfort Dilly, since it was her invitation that had brought this trouble upon her. Dilly must know that she was being talked of all over town, first on account of her father's disappearance, and now in connection with the fire, one trouble and humiliation following close upon the other. And how hurt and angry Dilly must be! One suspicion would be held to prove the other true, and how few people would now believe her innocent!

It was later on that same afternoon that Cherry, looking over the garden fence, saw Dilly's sturdy little figure tramping along the dusty road. Her faded muslin dress hung limply around her—Dilly was in the habit of starching her dresses so stiffly that they set out like a balloon—and the feather on her old straw hat remained in the same draggled state in which the rain of that eventful night had left it. Dilly had meant to freshen her hat by means of some of the famous bridesmaid pink silk, but had no heart to try any longer to be "like folks."

"Dilly! oh, Dilly!" cried Cherry over the fence, and Dilly stopped, looking inquiringly at Cherry. Was she going to tell her now that she had acknowledged to being in the barn with a light, and the dreadful suspicions against her were at an end? A gleam of hope lighted Dilly's dejected face as she looked at her.

"I'm so sorry, Dilly! It was I that got you into this trouble."

"You're a-goin' to tell, then, just how 'twas, be you? Then they'll know that 'twa'n't me that had a light," said Dilly, eagerly.

"Of course I knew in a moment that you ran back into the barn because of the lightning and the rain. I've said so to every one," said Cherry.

Dilly drew a long breath. "You ain't a-goin' to tell, then? It must have been something that you care a sight about keepin' dark. I can't see no great harm in it. You could take 'most anything that belonged to me, Cherry Eastman, I've set by you so." Dilly resolutely swallowed a choking sob. "And I ain't a-goin' to say anything. He's sent for me, Squire Brewster has. He hadn't no call to; he might have come where I was if he wanted to see me." Dilly



"CHERRY AND DILLY AT THE GARDEN FENCE."

tossed her head with a touch of her old defiance. "But I've come. Here I be. And I'm a-goin in to see him. And look a' here, Cherry Eastman, if you ain't a-goin' to tell that 'twas you that had a light there, why, *I* ain't a-goin' to. It 'most seems as if you *would* tell"—there was a pathetic tone of appeal in Dilly's voice—"seems as if it made such a sight more difference to me than it could make to you; but if you hain't a mind to tell, why, then, I've wished there was something I could do for you, and now I ain't a-goin' to flinch; you needn't be the least mite afraid that I'll tell, no matter if they send me to jail!"

"Dilly, I don't know what you mean. What is it that you think I don't want you to tell?" said Cherry, in bewilderment.

Dilly looked at her for a moment in silence. "You might trust me when I tell you I ain't a-goin' to tell anyhow," she said, at length.

"You *must* tell everything you know about the fire," said Cherry. "You seem to think that there is something I don't want you to tell. You are dreadfully puzzling, Dilly."

"You don't walk in your sleep, nor nothin', do you?" said Dilly, eagerly. "I've heard of folks that did."

"No, I am sure I don't; *why*, Dilly?" said Cherry, impatiently.

Dilly hesitated, looking curiously at Cherry; then she looked up and down the road, as if to be sure that no one was in sight, and then into the garden, where not a sound broke the silence save the buzzing of a bee around the tall hollyhocks in the midst of which Cherry was standing. Dilly leaned her head over the fence until her lips almost reached Cherry's ear.

"I *see* you that night!" she said. "Your lamp a-shinin', or the rooster a-crowin', or something, woke

me up. I was leanin' over the hay-loft lookin' at you all the time you was a-rummagin' in my rag-bags! If there was anything there that you wanted—"

"Why, Dilly Gage! What are you talking about?" cried Cherry. "If you thought you saw me in the barn that night, you must have been dreaming!"

Dilly shook her head decidedly.

"I pinched myself, and I wa'n't dreamin'," she said. "You seemed to be in a terrible hurry. You set your lamp down right among some wisps of hay, and I expect that's the way the fire ketched. If it's just because you don't want folks to blame you for the fire, why, it don't seem a mite like you, Cherry Eastman; but I'm a-goin' to let 'em say 'twas me, and that I done it a-purpose! Everything is so agin me I might as well. And they'd believe you before they would me anyhow. And you *was* real good to me, Cherry Eastman."

"Dilly, I wasn't in the barn that night. Do you think I would open your rag-bags? What *should* I want there?"

Cherry's tone was cold and decided. For the first time a doubt of Dilly Gage had struck her sharply. It was such a strange, improbable story. It was utterly false, she thought. It seemed as if Dilly must have invented it to divert suspicion from herself.

"I don't know what you wanted, but I guess I know that plaid cape of yours," said Dilly. She turned from the fence and took up her sturdy way to the house.

Cherry was still standing by the fence when, a few rods away, Dilly turned back.

"You was good to me, Cherry Eastman, when nobody else wa'n't, and I couldn't forget it if it was to save me!"

Cherry stood gazing after her in utter perplexity.

Had the others been right in distrusting Dilly Gage, after all? Perhaps she had been a sharer in her father's fraud! Loveday was right when she said that she (Cherry) "ought to pay more heed to older folks' judgment." Perhaps she had been dreaming (in spite of the pinch). She seemed so honest! And it seemed too queer a story for her to have made up. Cherry felt an impulse to go into the house and tell some one about it—Ben, or Phonse, or Rhoda. But on second thoughts she decided that there would be no consolation in hearing them say, as they would be sure to do, that "it was no more than might be expected that Dilly would invent such a story to shield herself." They "had always known that girl was sly." Cherry thought she had never known a more painful feeling than the sudden overthrow of her faith in Dilly Gage.

She stood motionless among the hollyhocks, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and her brain in a tangle of puzzling thoughts, and left Dilly to go, unfriended, into Uncle David's somewhat stern and forbidding presence.

Could a girl have such an honest, innocent look and be so false and wicked? What a wistful glance she had cast upon her as she turned away!

All her doubt gave way at once.

"I can't reason it out; Phonse may say I am just like a girl. I do believe in Dilly Gage! It's very queer; I think she was dreaming, but she means, I'm sure she means to tell the truth!"

Cherry rushed into the house by the nearest way, which was by flying leaps over the foundation for a new porch which the carpenters were already laying. They stared at her in wonder, and she heard them laugh. Rhoda would never be guilty of such an unlady-like proceeding. But Cherry had no time to la-

ment her impulsive deeds now. She was knocking, breathless, at the door of Uncle David's little office.

"Oh, may I come in, Uncle David?" she cried, as no answer came to her knock.

Uncle David looked at her with a slight frown of annoyance as he opened the door.

"I should prefer not to be disturbed," he said. "If you have anything to say, any new information—"

"I have, I have! I know Dilly didn't do it! I know that every word she says is true—or she thinks it is, although it seems so queer. I know it because—because I do!" Cherry paused, breathless.

"You seem to be a very valuable witness," said Uncle David, dryly.

Phonse was standing near the door, scowling darkly, and evidently anxious only to get away.

"You are sure, Phonse, that you saw this girl through the key-hole of the barn door, and that she had a light?" said Uncle David.

"Yes, I'm sure," said Phonse, emphatically. "I didn't see her face, you know," he added, as an after-thought. "But it was a girl; and it couldn't have been any one else."

Uncle David evidently thought that as much a matter of course as Phonse did, for he paid no attention to it.

"And *you* say you slept on the hay-loft until the smoke awakened you?" said Uncle David.

"No, I never said so," responded Dilly, promptly. "I said I never got down off the loft till then, and I never went nigh my wagon nor the barn floor at all, and I never had no light, nor no matches, nor nothing."

Dilly delivered herself of this superfluity of negatives with emphasis, but in a hopeless tone. She had cast one wistful, expectant glance at Cherry as she

came in, and then dejection and apathy had settled again upon her face. Uncle David regarded her searchingly, with knit brows.

"Did you see a light in the barn?—did you see or hear any other person there?" he demanded, suddenly.

Dilly hesitated and her face changed.

"Do you know who set the fire?" asked Uncle David, sternly, noting the change.

Cherry was tempted to tell of the strange delusion that possessed Dilly with regard to her presence in the barn, but would not that hurt Dilly's cause rather than help it?

"No; I don't know who set the fire. I don't expect nobody set it—a purpose," said Dilly.

"Did you see or hear any one in the barn that night? or did you know that there was a light there?" said Uncle David, returning to his first unanswered question.

"I ain't a-goin' to say any more about it," said Dilly; and she folded her arms across her breast with an air of determined endurance. "I didn't have anything to do with it, more'n I liked to got burned to death. You can put me in jail if you're a mind to, but you can't make me say any more."

Uncle David paced up and down, as was his habit when perplexed or annoyed; then he turned to Dilly.

"I sha'n't detain you now," he said. "I want you to think this over, and I am sure you will realize how much better it will be for you to tell all that you know about this affair. It may be a very serious matter for you otherwise."

There was a slight noise at the other side of the door (seldom used) which led from the office to the parlor. Rhoda, listening, pale and trembling, had placed her hand upon the knob; but her resolution failed, and the next moment the opportunity was gone. Lawyer Phil-

ipson was coming along the drive-way. He always went into the office without knocking.

Dilly turned in the door-way, with scarcely a touch of her old defiance, but with a patient dejection in her appearance.

"I ain't never a-goin' to tell," she said.

CHAPTER XX.

Dilly had gone on her homeward way, and Cherry had repressed her strong impulse to run after her and tell her that she still believed her innocent. Of what use was it while Dilly would only look reproachfully at her, and persist in her strange fancy that it was she who had set the fire?

"I think that girl will run away," Phonse announced at dinner. "She must know that it's of no use for her to pretend that she didn't do it."

"She will be watched," said Uncle David. "The matter of her connection with the fire looks rather worse to me than it did. I thought it probable that she set it accidentally. Now it is evident that she knows something about it which she is determined to keep secret. There seems to be some one else concerned in it."

"It's very likely that she is only an accessary," said Phonse.

That dreadful word again! Phonse seemed to take a positive delight in calling Dilly Gage an accessary, thought Cherry, feeling very unreasonably angry. Perhaps it was because it gratified his vanity to use a word which sounded so knowing. Perhaps it really wasn't

so bad as if he had accused her of doing the wickedness alone, but it had a perfectly horrid sound, and he did say it as if he liked to.

"Phonse, did you say that you didn't see the girl's face when you looked through the key-hole?" asked Uncle David, suddenly, and Rhoda dropped her fork with a great clatter.

"No; I don't think I did," said Phonse, slowly. "Of course I knew it must be Dilly Gage."

"What did she have on?" asked Cherry.

"Oh, I don't notice girls' toggery," said Phonse, impatiently. "But I do remember now that she had on a sort of cape that covered her all up, and it had a hood that went over her head."

"Dilly hasn't a cape like that," said Cherry.

"She might have borrowed one," said Loveday. "Almost all the gossamer water-proofs are made like that. It was rainy, too."

"But she hadn't one on in the evening," persisted Cherry; "she had only her old shawl. And she didn't go anywhere to borrow one. I don't think she did," she added, more faintly, remembering that Dilly had not told her what had befallen her before she returned to the barn.

"Great you know about what she did!" said Phonse, scornfully. "What other girl could it have been? If it was any other, it must have been one who came with her or whom she let in."

And Dilly had thought she saw her there with her long cape on! reflected Cherry, so deeply absorbed that she did not know that her hands were folded in her lap and her soup was growing cold. Could she have walked in her sleep? She was on the point of revealing this deeper mystery of Dilly's accusation, when Ben created a diversion by suddenly announcing

that Rhoda looked like True Pulsifer's sister who died of consumption.

"She's so nervous! The fire has wore her all out," said Loveday. "And I always used to think 'twas Cherry that had the nerves."

"She isn't looking well. I think she must have a change. Your aunt Adam is at Nahant. I shall write and ask her to take charge of Rhoda for a few weeks," said Uncle David.

"You'll like that, won't you, Rhoda?" said Cherry, sympathetically, and feeling a pang of conscience that she had scarcely been aware of Rhoda's illness, in her interest in Dilly Gage's fortunes.

"Can I go soon, papa?" asked Rhoda, anxiously. What a blessed relief it would be to get away where that fire and Dilly Gage's probable share in it were not continually talked about! she thought. And no harm was likely to come to Dilly Gage. She had heard several people say that it would not be possible to prove anything against her. Philander, who approved of severe measures, declared that "although the squire was so stern appearin', he was as soft as molasses-candy in'ardly, and would let that girl go scot-free."

To get away was apparently all that Rhoda thought of now. She was feverishly eager about her preparations, and consulted all the railroad-guides available to discover the earliest moment at which a letter from Aunt Adam might be expected. Once away, she should think no more about this matter. It was only a trifle, and she had grown morbid by brooding over it. What could it matter to a girl like Dilly Gage to be suspected of anything? No one could possibly have any confidence in her, because of the fraud of which her father and she had been guilty.

Rhoda cared nothing now about the fair for which she had been working so enthusiastically. She gave all the pretty things she had made to Cherry—there was no hand-screen of cameo-pink silk among them—and said, languidly, that it made no difference, when Cherry protested that she ought to have the credit of them. It was so unlike Rhoda! Cherry remembered, with a pang, that a girl in a story which she had read who died young had done just so, and she lay awake at night crying softly as she recalled all the "horrid things" she had done to Rhoda, from the time when, down behind the gooseberry-bushes—oh, shocking recollection!—she had called her "a pig," up to their very latest quarrel. There was no doubt about it, Rhoda was exactly like the girl in the story who died!

Her mind was so absorbed in Rhoda and Rhoda's preparations that she almost forgot Dilly Gage's mysterious conduct, and all her wrongs and troubles. She shared Philander's conclusion that Uncle David was too kind-hearted to be hard upon a defenceless girl like Dilly, who, to use her own words, "had never had a chance to be like folks," and, moreover, he was very busy with other affairs. Lawyer Philipson came to see him every day, with his green bag bulging with papers, as if he had just come from court; and he was also considering plans for the erection of the new buildings. Uncle David was very fond of "the old place," as he called it, which had belonged to his great-grandfather, and all Byerly was interested with him in the plans for rebuilding. A Chelmsborough architect had been applied to for plans, but every one in the village was ready with some suggestion.

Little Dr. Clinch came bustling up the hill early one morning, "leavin' his dish-water all a-coolin'," as he announced, to display some new ideas for a horse's

stall which he had sat up half the night to produce satisfactorily upon paper. While he was doing that there had popped into his head a plan for a bird-house upon which he expected to secure a patent and make his fortune. Phonse was greatly interested in this latter invention, which afforded every appliance for health and convenience in bird house-keeping.

The Chelmsborough architect's plans had also just arrived, and were spread out upon the table, and every one, even Ben and Simmy Backup, whose pursuits led them much afield in these vacation days, had gathered around to see them. Cherry ran and called Rhoda. She would like to know that the new barn was to be very "stylish," and to express her opinion whether the vane should be a new gilt horse, a silver arrow, or the old tarnished chanticleer, which Philander had rescued from the ruins, and to which their fancies all clung fondly, especially that of Cherry, who could remember when Philander had made her believe that that rooster could crow!

It was quite thrilling to hold the old cock in one's hands, to discover how astonishingly large he was, almost as much as one could lift, and to find out what the letters under his feet, which one had been able dimly to descry from some points, really were. Philander, who had been on two ladders, almost up to the lofty height where he lived, had declared that they set forth the rhyme of the ancient primers:

> "The cock doth crow to let us know,
> If we be wise, what time to rise."

But it was quite evident now that this, as they had always suspected, was only one of the efforts of Philander's very active imagination. They proved to be the name of the firm where chanticleer was bought, and of

the old, old street in Boston where that firm had been located. They were all examining it with eager interest, and Rhoda was giving Philander "a pursed-up look" (that was what Ben called it) for "story-telling," when in walked Mr. Pringle.

Ben and Simmy greeted him with a chorus of inquiries about the bear, and a chorus of lamentations that the show was not coming to Byerly. But Mr. Pringle had not his usual jovial air, and he answered their inquiries somewhat shortly. His genial face wore a shadow of trouble, and after he had sat down he rubbed his bald head and bestowed little embarrassed hitches upon his trousers-legs, like Philander when one accused him of discrepancies.

"I was wantin' to have a little talk with you, squire," he said. "No, 'tain't noways a private matter. If it had been kept private, why, then I shouldn't have had a call to come here." There was a slight accent of reproach in his voice. "You see, the show business is wearin' to an old man, and he wants a little home of his own where he can sleep nights without thinkin' of joggin' along in the mornin'. I was calc'latin' that my little granddaughter—she was all I had after her mother died, sixteen year ago—that she was goin' to be my house-keeper when I got me such a little place, but she was took away." The old man's voice gave out on the last word, as if it were lost in his great white beard. But he found it again, and went on. "They offered me a chance to take care of the Pendleton Museum, over to Chelmsborough. 'Twas just what I wanted. I like to be among animal creturs. I set more by 'em livin' than I do stuffed, but I like 'em, anyhow. And then there's a little shop to let over there in the row facin' the common, with a nice little tenement belongin' to it, with a bit of garden slopin'

down to the river in the rear. I'm calc'latin' to keep a kind of a bird shop there—live canaries and such; also stuffin' and mountin' neatly executed, white mice and tame squirrels and different kinds of small pets; and I want to raise a young alligator and a couple of bear cubs that I have on hand. I was lookin' to have Dilly Gage to keep house for me."

"Bear cubs and an alligator! What luck some people do have!" said Simmy Backup, aside, to Ben, with a groan of envy.

"Dilly Gage and my Phœbe was friends, and I always took to her. Kind of pert and sarcy, mebbe, but land! she was always right there! What I mean is, you could trust her. I know well enough what her father was. I never had any doubt but he was up to his tricks about that railroad business. But talk about her bein' knowin' to it! Why, it ain't in her to be anything but as honest as daylight."

"I knew it, Mr. Pringle—I always knew it!" cried Cherry, fervently. And then she remembered those few minutes in the garden, after Dilly had told her that very queer story, and added, guiltily, "At least, almost always."

Mr. Pringle continued, without noticing the interruption:

"I could have given her a good home, and she could have 'tended the shop for me while I was at the museum. It's more fittin' for a girl to be 'tendin' a little home-like kind of a shop, with creturs in it for company, than to be ridin' round the country atop of a tin-wagon—that's *my* idee. And I've been consid'able savin', and I was calc'latin' that she should be to me jest the same as my own granddaughter would have been. I should have left her consid'able well provided for when my time come to go. But now, you see,

'long of these stories that's in everybody's mouth, how she set your barn afire, she ain't willin' to go with me. I've listened to 'em all, and I don't take a mite of stock in 'em, not a mite, and they didn't hender me from askin' her. She was so tickled at first that she burst right out cryin'. 'T'would seem 'most as if I'd got to heaven,' says she. But, then, when she come to think, says she: 'Grandpa Pringle, I should ruin the business! I've got such a bad name that nobody wouldn't come to the shop!' I expect it would be bad for the shop, and business is business; but, still, I says to her, 'Come; I'm willin' to resk it, Dilly,' says I. But she won't come. She says she ain't goin' to hurt nor hender anybody that's been kind to her. I'd take her and go 'way off where these mis'able stories wa'n't never heard of, only there's the museum, you see. It's consid'able of an income, and it's a consolation to an old man to have satisfyin' work; and she wouldn't let me give it up for her sake. So what I was thinkin', squire, was that if you'd come right out flat and say you didn't believe no such a thing about her, and you didn't hold with folks talkin' about her as they do, why, mebbe 'twould turn the tide in her favor, so'st she wouldn't think she'd ruin the business, and seems as if you must feel that 'tain't any more'n right to a defenceless girl."

"But, my dear sir," said Uncle David, with a stern air, "you must remember that her defenceless condition doesn't alter the fact that she may be guilty. There are some circumstances which point very strongly to that conclusion. She admits that she knows something about it which she will not tell. If you can prove her innocent, or explain these mysterious circumstances which connect her with the affair, I shall be only too happy to help to spread the tidings of such a result far and wide."

"That's the best you can do, is it?" said Grandpa Pringle, heavily. "You think she done it, and you're goin' to stick to it."

"I strongly advised her to conf—to tell all she knew about it, but she seemed very obstinate," said Uncle David. "I am very reluctant to take any measures against her, but you must see that it is impossible for me to announce a belief in her innocence which I do not possess."

"Then I expect it ain't any use to talk, and I'd better be goin'," said Mr. Pringle, rising slowly. "Seems queer to me how you can think she done it; but, then, you see, I knew Dilly Gage when she was a baby."

It was evident that this did not strike Uncle David as a convincing argument. Cherry expected him to say to Mr. Pringle, as sarcastically as he had said it to her, that he was a valuable witness; but instead he said, somewhat shortly:

"I am sorry that I can't look at the matter as you do, but it is quite impossible."

"Can't you coax her to go with you, Mr. Pringle?"

It was Rhoda who spoke. She was very pale, and her eyes looked large and dark and startled—"almost as if they were not Rhoda's eyes at all," Cherry said to herself; her voice, too, was strained and unnatural. "Papa wouldn't have her arrested or anything, would you, papa? No one *knows* that she had anything to do with it, and after a while people would stop talking about it."

Grandpa Pringle shook his head slowly.

"I expect the story would be all the time a-croppin' up and tormentin' her, and folks would fight shy of the shop. She thinks so, and she's middlin' sot in her way, Dilly is. She won't never agree to it. Seems kind of hard, when 'twould make such a comfortable little

home for her 'n' me. 'I've got a tradin' bump,' says Dilly, 'and I could do real well in the shop, and I'm handy about the house, too; and it's the first chance I ever had to be like folks.' Seems a pity, but she won't never agree to it so long as folks believe that she set that fire."

"They won't believe it!" cried Rhoda, in a shrill, high-keyed voice. "Nobody shall believe it, because I'll tell all about it! I want every one, every one in the town, to know that I did it! I set my lamp down where there was hay—I was in such a hurry. It was I that Phonse saw through the door. I had on Cherry's cape with the hood; I caught it off the hook as I ran through the hall. I—I wanted something out of Dilly Gage's rag-bag—it was a piece of pink silk to make a screen for the fair—and I couldn't bear to ask her for it. I had said unkind things to her, and she was rude to me. I put something into the bag in place of it—a piece of blue silk—but I couldn't bear to own that I had done it. I didn't think at first that any one would be accused of setting the fire, and then—"

Rhoda's voice broke suddenly. It was so terrible to meet all those wondering eyes, to see the mortification, worse than anger, in her father's face; to be ashamed before them all—she who had almost never been to blame! But she conquered her voice, in the midst of a dead silence. "And then—I was ashamed that I hadn't told at once; that I had let Dilly Gage be so unjustly suspected. I don't know how I could have done it. I never knew I was so wicked. But I always wanted to be thought very good and—and grown-up, and the lady of the house, and so I kept it to myself, and it has almost killed me; and now you'll all despise and hate me—but every one will know that Dilly Gage had nothing to do with it, and she can have the little house and the shop and all!"

"Oh, Rhoda!" Cherry drew Rhoda's trembling form down onto the red sofa, and gave her what she would have described as "a great hug."

There was a silence which no one seemed able to break. Uncle David seemed to be shocked and surprised out of all his dignified self-command. Tears were running down Loveday's cheeks, and the little horse-doctor blew his nose very hard. A faint exclamation—"Rhoda—whew!" had come from Ben's corner of the room. It was Simmy Backup—Simmy who had never been distinguished for tact—who came to the rescue.

"I say, Rhoda, you're a reg'lar brick, anyhow. It takes an orfle lot of pluck for a fellow to come right up and face the music like that."

Uncle David cleared his throat and spoke with an effort. "You have tried to atone for the wrong, Rhoda; that is a great deal," he said. But it was evident that his pride and his faith in Rhoda were both sorely wounded. "The first thing to be attended to," he continued, "is to make the matter as public as possible." They all understood that it cost Squire Brewster something to say that, but perhaps no one knew quite how much.

"The worst of it is you can't be bad without hurting some one else"—that was what Rhoda was saying to herself.

"It must be known that our suspicions have greatly wronged Dilly Gage."

"Dilly thinks it was I, and she wouldn't tell of me!" cried Cherry, realizing suddenly all that Dilly's silence had meant. "Rhoda had my cape on, and she saw her. She told me that she saw *me* there. I thought just for a moment that she made it up, and so I didn't tell of it; then I knew there must be some strange mis-



"CHERRY GIVES RHODA A 'GREAT HUG.'"

take; because if you know Dilly you are sure that she won't tell a lie."

"There seems to be something really noble about the girl," said Uncle David, with a perplexed expression.

"Then you're willin', Squire Brewster, that I should tell folks just how 'twas?" said Grandpa Pringle, eagerly. "I mean that Dilly hadn't anything at all to do with it, but it was just a little carelessness on your little girl's part."

"I think it is due to Dilly Gage that all the circumstances should be known," said Uncle David; and then he crossed the room to Rhoda, and laid his hand upon her head. "My poor little girl!" he said. "It is a hard lesson, but I think you have learned it well."

Cherry cast about in her mind for some consolation to offer, Rhoda was so unnaturally tearless. "You'll be gone away soon, and then you won't mind so much," she said. "You'll have such a good time at Nahant!"

"I don't want to go now," said Rhoda. "I would rather stay and bear it, and have it over with. I don't want to let myself run away from it."

"Perhaps it would be better to stay," said Uncle David.

"I expect I'd better go and tell her of it first. It'll perk her up consid'able," said Grandpa Pringle, whose thoughts were all for Dilly.

Cherry's first impulse was to jump up and cry out, "Oh, let me go, too!" She wished to beg Dilly's pardon for having doubted her for a moment, and she longed to see Dilly's joy. Dilly would be in her element in a little shop full of birds and animals; her solitary life had made her very fond of them. She had once confided to Cherry that she liked animals, because she "felt as if she was born acquainted with 'em, while she had to get acquainted with folks."

But Cherry repressed her impulse because Rhoda was clinging unconsciously to her hand. Rhoda, for the first time in her life, seemed to need her sympathy, and Cherry's heart was deeply touched by it. Moreover, Grandpa Pringle had perhaps a better right to be the first to tell Dilly. They would have their plans to talk over, and she might be in the way.

"But I will go to see Dilly to-morrow, the very first thing in the morning," she resolved. "Uncle David can't object to my going now."

CHAPTER XXI.

It was a sunshiny morning, with Summer still in her bloom, and throwing out only such gay hints as golden-rod and asters that she meant to go by-and-by; and Cherry, going once more through the woods road to Roaring Brook, on Tam's back, said to herself that she was happier than she deserved to be. Happiness was a sort of discipline to Cherry, as trouble is to many people; it caused her to reflect upon the smallness of her deserts. She thought that it had been "mean" of her to doubt Dilly Gage; Dilly, who, with no "good influences," had been better and braver than she could have been. And it must have been chiefly her fault that Rhoda and she had quarrelled so, Rhoda was so really sweet-tempered and lovely now. And yet the most penitent person must be aware that Rhoda was much "easier to get along with" than she had ever been before.

"She's so much nicer since she was bad!" was what Cherry said to herself, puzzling over deeper problems than had ever entered her mind before this summer's

experience. She thought of Loveday's comment: "Folks's mistakes and sins are always steps to 'em; some goes up by 'em and some goes down."

Rhoda had gone up by hers, she was sure; she was not probably going to be a different Rhoda all at once, but she would never be so sure of her own goodness, or so ready to blame others again. It was pleasant to see the really delicate consideration shown her by the boys, whose small escapades she had always regarded with great severity, and been sure to tell of if she had an opportunity. They, in return, had always had some jeer ready for all Rhoda's dignified assumptions; now they were almost capable of being politely reticent, Cherry thought, if Rhoda should put on a trained dress, and "do up" her hair!"

"You're all so good to me, the boys and all!" Rhoda had said, and it was then that her hard, strained manner had given way, and she had burst into tears.

Ben and Simmy Backup had gone out in the leaky old boat on Hewitt's Pond, and brought her a great bunch of water-lilies, and Phonse—*Phonse!*—had actually offered to draw a mandarin for her on the little afternoon tea-cloth which she was making for the fair; for, after all, Rhoda had listened to Cherry's reasoning, and concluded that her effort to "live down" her disgrace must include taking part in the fair as if nothing had happened.

And now Rhoda thought of the story of the prodigal son, and found a meaning in it that had never been there for her before.

She had said to Cherry that she wanted to do something for Dilly Gage, something to "make up" for the wrong which she had done. But Cherry found it difficult to suggest any way of atonement, except that to which Mr. Pringle and Uncle David were already at-

tending—the stopping of the unjust accusations against Dilly by relating the facts of the case. It is very difficult to "make up" for wrongs in this world.

Cherry was revolving in her mind the faint beginnings of a new plan as she rode through the woods road to Roaring Brook. Dilly Gage had said, over and over, with deepest feeling, that she (Cherry) had helped her just by "treating her as if she were like folks." There were others in the Roaring Brook settlement whom she might help in the same way. There were three young Bumpus girls, younger than Cally; perhaps even Cally might be helped, although one might shrink from her abruptness of manner and speech. And sixteen-year-old Louy Bumpus, who had been a nursery-maid in Chelmsborough, and was at home now, ill with hip-disease, was very gentle and lovely. She might be a useful assistant in carrying out Cherry's plan. Mort Bumpus, the youngest boy, aged fifteen, had been in jail for robbing hen-roosts; and little Nick Lowry, who lived at the foot of Tumble Down Hill, and was only thirteen, had been arrested for breaking into a store. That was unpromising material, very. Cherry almost decided that it would be better to confine her efforts to the girls, especially as most of the Roaring Brook boys hooted at her, and Pel Trefry set his dog upon her, because he disapproved, on general principles, of "stuck-up" folks. She meant to have some sewing and reading classes for the girls, with a good time to follow each session. Rhoda, she thought, might be willing now to help, but Rhoda would know how to give them clothes and advice better than to give them herself—her companionship and sympathy. To "make a feast" and invite them as guests, to make herself one with them—Rhoda would not understand how to do that. She might

learn, but it would take time. Dilly would understand; she would be able to inspire the others with her own desire to be "like folks," which, though vain and foolish in some respects, had its strong leaven of good. Dilly would be the connecting link between her and the people whom she wished to help. How strangely things had happened to open the way for her! Helping Dilly Gage had broadened her horizon so that now she saw a whole world full of people to help, and was no more in danger of growing morbid over Phonse's unsatisfactory fortunes and her own. And a new thought struck her now: Phonse might help her about the boys. It would have seemed an absurd idea even six months ago. Phonse had felt an intense, a morbid pity for animals, but his sympathies had apparently been confined to them. Now, since he had been troubled by a fear that he had wronged the Gages, Cherry had discovered in him a feeling for other people. He had been hard upon Dilly; he had refused to believe in her; but circumstances had been strongly against Dilly—and she had "made faces!" Phonse couldn't forget that. But now that he had discovered his mistake he showed a deep interest in Dilly's vindication.

"People are often better than a fellow thinks," he had said, wisely, to Cherry. "Perhaps you were right about that girl—if a fellow *would* just as lief go near a porcupine."

It was not impossible that Phonse might yet help to make a feast for the Roaring Brook boys and girls. And Ben and Simmy, too; Ben, in his natural kindness and good-fellowship, could win them any time. They never included him among "stuck-up folks," although his air of comradeship never descended to sharing, in the smallest degree, their roughness of

manner or speech. Yes, Ben could help; Ben had given them free tickets to the bear-show.

And Chelmsborough was not so far away but that Dilly could come over to the good times.

So Cherry rode on with her pleasant plans and the anticipation of sharing Dilly's joy in her happy fortunes for company.

But when she reached the little tumble-down house there were no signs of life about it; the blinds and the door were closed, and no one came in answer to her knock. She fastened Tam to a tree, and sat down on the door-step to wait. Dilly would certainly be at home by noon, she thought, for through the chinks in the shed door she could see that her horse and wagon were there. Perhaps she had gone to Chelmsborough with Grandpa Pringle to attend to the fitting up of the little house and shop. Cherry could imagine the pleasure that she would take in that.

"You needn't sit there waitin' for Dilly Gage; she's gone 'way off, and she ain't never comin' back."

It was 'Lando Bumpus who called to her. He was going towards the shed with a pail in his hand, evidently to feed the horse.

"Has she gone already—gone to Chelmsborough?" asked Cherry.

"Chelmsborough! Well, I guess not. There ain't likely to be much of that in her'n," said 'Lando, slangy but pathetic.

"Has anything happened?" faltered Cherry.

"Her father—he's turned up! And he's in trouble, of course. He wouldn't never have sent for her if he hadn't been. He's got a shock in good earnest now; kind of cur'us, ain't it? No shamming this time. He's 'way off down to Fall River, in a hospital. The nurse that's takin' care of him wrote to Dilly. He said



"SO CHERRY RODE ON WITH HER PLEASANT PLANS."

that first off they thought he was goin' to die, but now the doctor says he may live for years, but he won't never be able to help himself much if any, and he wanted Dilly wrote to, to come and take care of him. She's got a tough row to hoe, Dilly Gage has. She used to try to keep folks from knowin' how cantankerous he was, but she couldn't. All the folks down here advised her not to go nigh him; he wa'n't never any kind of a father to her; but she wouldn't hear to 'em. She said nobody wouldn't bear with him as she would, and, anyhow, he was her father. She was in a terrible hurry to get off. Mr. Pringle helped her, but he was all worked up about it. She said she expected she'd have to send for her horse and wagon; she didn't know as there'd be any other way that she could support herself and her father; she'd kind of got used to tin-peddlin'. Folks thinks he's got consid'able money, but he'll hide it away, and make her work herself to death to support 'em, you see if he don't. I heard her givin' Mr. Pringle a lot of messages for you. There was something about her payin' for a horse, and more about how much she set by you—kind of girl hifalutin, I expect." But although he made this slighting remark, 'Lando Bumpus, meeting the gaze of Cherry's brimming eyes, drew his shirt-sleeve rapidly and roughly across his own. "She's an orfle nice girl, Dilly Gage is," he said. "She's *square*."

After all, the standards of the Roaring Brook settlement were not so different from those of Flying Hill.

"Seemed kind of hard, didn't it?" pursued 'Lando, "comin' just when she'd got such a chance. You never see anybody so pleased as she was about the little house and shop she was goin' to have over to Chelmsborough! If she'd been goin' to sit in a rockin'-chair and have a hired girl to wait on her, like Queen Victory

or the President's wife, she wouldn't have been half so tickled. She's got a master-head for business, if she is a girl, Dilly Gage has. She'd have showed 'em over to Chelmsborough that Roaring Brook folks have got talents, if they hain't got anything else."

Cherry listened to 'Lando's flow of eloquence in silence. Her heart was too full for speech.

As she mounted Tam and turned his head homeward, life seemed to Cherry a sad and heavy thing. The little shop—her fancy had painted it over and over, with its fascinating stock; she had not taken in the alligator and the bear cubs of Simmy's envy—their charms were not apparent to Cherry—but the birds, gay cockatoos, and funny talking parrots, and the white mice and squirrels of which Dilly would be so fond; and there was to be a delightful little tinkling bell on the door, like the one at Miss Cratchett's; and the rooms behind and above the shop were to be so homelike, with muslin curtains tied back with ribbons, and blossoming plants, and plenty of mottoes, and tidies, and pictures, to make it look "like folks," as Dilly would love to have it; it would not matter in the least if Rhoda thought them "horrid" and "common," or Phonse scowled at them as "inartistic" and "ugly"; they would suit Dilly. But now, alas! the little shop and the little home had proved to be but the "baseless fabric of a dream." And her plans to help the Roaring Brook girls and boys—should she ever have the heart to carry them out without Dilly? They would not let her help them, she thought, without Dilly as a mediator, they had so great a prejudice against the "stuck-up" folks on Flying Hill. How foolish she had been to think that things had come about strangely as if to open the way for her little plans! God had swept them away as if they were but cobwebs; they

were evidently of no account whatever in his great scheme of things. It seemed to matter little whether one tried to help others or not. Perhaps one might as well devote one's self entirely to animals, as Phonse had done, even if one got such a craze as to give pound-cake to the pig; or, as Rhoda had done, think only in a vague way of "doing right," and of getting one's hair done up and one's dresses long.

So Cherry allowed herself to be easily discouraged, and went faintheartedly homeward, yet not without an inward consciousness that she might and perhaps should, after she recovered from the first shock of disappointment, carry out her plans without Dilly's help. Rhoda, in her place, would do it, she knew. Rhoda had more strength of purpose.

Cherry found plenty of sympathy in her trouble at home. They had all been interested in Dilly Gage's happy prospects, and all mourned for their overthrow. Uncle David even said that they must not lose sight of her; they must try to help her; he was afraid her life was likely to be a hard one with that rascally old father of hers.

"He's an old rascal, of course," said Phonse, and Phonse was scowling so that he was a sight to see.

It was in the great wide hall, where they often sat on a warm afternoon, and Phonse had started up suddenly from the sofa on which he had stretched himself.

"He's an old rascal, but I'm glad I've found out where he is. I've been trying to find out, because I don't think he told a lie about what he heard that day he was hurt—about the time, you know. He meant to tell the truth then, if he was telling an orfle lot of lies. I suppose he asked me on purpose to pretend he couldn't see."

Phonse spoke hesitatingly. Cherry knew, if no one else did, how hard the words came.

"Phonse!—you didn't—"

Uncle David changed color; he half started from his seat.

"No; I didn't tell him," said Phonse, "but Chissy Fenwick did. I remembered when that fellow repeated just what he said—'It's nineteen minutes past three, but that old clock is never right.' I ought to have told, but I didn't."

Phonse offered none of the excuses for himself about which he had been so strenuous in telling Cherry how it had happened. Cherry rushed in with them: he had not been asked whether any one else had said it; the lawyer had "badgered" him, there had been so little time to think, etc.

"The whole truth—that was what you swore to tell, Phonse," said Uncle David, severely.

"Yes; I did, and I didn't tell it," said Phonse. "I guess a fellow knows what he's done! He has to be thankful when it doesn't do much harm. I want that old fellow to know that I owned up. I did it, but I wouldn't do it again."

"I hope you wouldn't! I *think* you wouldn't, Phonse," said Uncle David, slowly. "If things had turned out differently—if the old tin-peddler had really been injured—"

"It made me 'most crazy to think of it, but I wouldn't tell. I *couldn't* go through with it all again. Cherry wanted me to tell then, but I wouldn't. I thought she was going to tell of me, but she went down to see Dilly Gage instead, to find out whether they were suffering. That's how she got into that scrape about the horse."

"You and Cherry seem to have had a mania for

keeping secrets," said Uncle David, with a frown. "It is very wrong of you."

"We've found that out," said Phonse; "but Cherry didn't want to be a telltale. Besides, I threatened to run away; that always scares her."

"Upon my word, you're a brave fellow," cried Uncle David, "to scare a girl into keeping the secret of your misdoing!"

"It *was* mean," said Phonse, candidly. "I rather think I've always been pretty mean to Cherry. It was pretty sneaking about the arithmetic, you know. I—I made her do it."

"But he was orfly brave at the fire," cried Cherry. "And—and sneaks never own up. Oh, Uncle David, we can't be like people in a story, all good, and I don't think we're all bad; we're mixed."

"Mixed! I should think so!" exclaimed Uncle David. He was walking up and down the hall, but the heaviness of his frown had lessened; there was even the slightest of twinkles in his eyes.

"I—I think Cherry might have told," said Rhoda. "I knew that she had something on her mind. If I hadn't been hateful about writing to Chissy Fenwick! Perhaps it wasn't any harm to write, but I threatened her, and she was angry. And, after all, the letter wasn't directed right. Mrs. Chisholm told me last week that she found she had made a mistake when she gave me the address; so we should never have known about it if Phonse hadn't told—even if Chissy Fenwick had remembered, which I suppose isn't likely."

"It was a lie, Phonse!" Uncle David had paused in his walk directly in front of Phonse, and was looking down at him sternly. "I was quite proud of you that day in court, and you were guilty of falsehood!"

"I've known it all summer," said Phonse, looking utterly miserable.

"But he didn't mean to, Uncle David. He told the truth when it cost him a lot. He was taken by surprise, and he had only a minute to think. And it was so hard to have to go through with it all over again!" said Cherry, full of eagerness.

"He wasn't so bad as I—not half," said Rhoda, firmly.

"You don't lack earnest defenders, Phonse," said Uncle David. "I am afraid that I haven't done my duty by you; I haven't understood you; I am not sure that I do now; but I think that with God's help you may make yourself a strong, noble man." None of them had ever heard Uncle David speak with so much feeling.

"I won't be a liar or a sneak, anyway," said Phonse, conquering a sob.

"Well, well! a pretty summer I've had with you all!" said Uncle David, in a lighter tone, and with a return of the twinkle. "Are there any more confessions in order? What have *you* been up to, Ben?"

"It isn't I, sir," said Ben, with a serious wag of his head. "I've been pretty fair, for me. Perhaps it was having the pig to take up my mind. I haven't anything particular to confess—it's Philander."

"Philander!" echoed Uncle David. "Oh, I know about him; but that isn't exactly a confession. He's going to marry Lizy Ann, Mrs. Backup's hired girl, and he wants the little old farm-house at the end of the lane to go to house-keeping in."

"Oh, but that isn't all," said Ben, amid a chorus of exclamations.

"Philander! why, he's as old as Father Christmas in the *Illustrated Almanac!*" cried Cherry.

"He would drink sweetened water with ginger in it, in haying-time, when Lizy Ann fixed it, and he hates it! I put two and two together then," said Rhoda, shrewdly.

"But he *must* come up and tell stories in winter evenings," said Cherry. "We never shall outgrow them."

"I don't know whether he'll ever tell any more," said Ben. "It's about those stories that he's confessed. He said he felt as if he ought to tell Lizy Ann the truth, and she thought 'twas his duty to tell everybody. He wanted me to tell; he said 'twould embarrass him so much. He 'wouldn't have told anyhow for nothin' in the world but Lizy Ann's sake.' He's made 'em all up!"

"Well, we haven't any of us supposed that he hadn't since we were six years old, have we?" said Rhoda.

"All of them, you know," explained Ben, with serious emphasis. "He never was mate of the *Sarah Baker!*"

"Oh, *Ben!*" Cherry's tone was full of disappointment.

"He never went to sea at all," continued Ben, remorselessly.

"I don't see how he could know so much about it," said Rhoda; while Cherry said only "Oh, dear!" again.

"He never was in sight of the sea in his life. He was 'born and brought up down to Hardscrabble,' he said; and he never was more than ten miles away from it until he came here."

Astonishment caused a dead silence for a moment.

"I wouldn't have minded about the purple peris and dragons, and all that kind of thing," said Cherry, plaintively. "Of course I know he made them up. But the *Sarah Baker!* why, I knew just how she looked,

from her old-fashioned figure-head of a yellow-haired lady to the half-worn-out letters on her stern; it's just like losing an old friend! And there was the time they found the stowaway, and the awful storm when they saved the crew and passengers of the *Victoria.* And there never was any *Sarah Baker* at all. Oh, how could Philander do it!"

"He said he was always meaning to tell that it wasn't true, and it had 'wore on his conscience consid'able, pertickerlerly when he found how shocked Lizy Ann was about it.' And he said he 'was ready to confess it right out in meetin', if Squire Brewster thought he ought to.'"

Squire Brewster's stern features relaxed into mirth. "Philander is very truthful generally," he said. "I don't think his confession need go any further. I shouldn't wonder if he should turn out to be the coming great American novelist."

"There's one good thing about it, Cherry," said Ben, addressing his consoling remarks to the most deeply affected one of the party, "Philander can begin a brand-new set of stories; he says he can. And he says he can do better when he isn't hampered by anybody's expecting him to stick to facts."

"I must say I think it was very wrong of Philander," said Rhoda. "But then, if he is really sorry— And it will be delightful to have some brand-new stories. I was tired of that old ship, and I always thought it went through too much."

But Cherry still mourned for the *Sarah Baker*— which never was—and she was only aroused from her sadness by Phonse's low-voiced request that she should come and help him write to Preserved Gage. They must go to Mr. Pringle and get the address. And then, too, they should hear from Dilly.

Phonse wanted "to have it over with." He could have no interest even in Philander's "confession" until that had been accomplished.

CHAPTER XXII.

"No, it will never be just the same as if I had told the whole truth that day in court; you can't make me believe it will," said Phonse, in answer to Cherry's earnest efforts at consolation. "If a fellow could only take things back! I feel now as if I would be willing to go through with it all again if I could. I'm not going to keep on talking about it, like a girl, but if ever you catch me being anything but square again—"

The painful task of writing to Preserved Gage was accomplished.

"If he wants every one to know how it was, I'm willing," said Phonse. "It must have been so awfully provoking to the old rascal, you know, to have no one believe the only thing he said that was true, or that he thought was true. But there's one excuse that I might have made for myself that I never did, Cherry. It would have been easier for me to say, 'I didn't say that, but Chissy Fenwick did;' but I had mustered all my courage to own up about—about my not being able to tell time, if it *was* humiliating enough to kill a fellow, and it came over me like a flash that although that would be a relief it would ruin Uncle David. I didn't seem to think that 'twas wrong not to do it, not until I'd come down from the witness-stand; then I was 'most crazy right away. But I felt as if it would kill me to get up there again."

"It was hard, orfly hard, Phonse," said Cherry, with deep sympathy.

"A fellow has to learn that there's just one thing to be done, to be *square*, first of all, and in spite of everything. I hope every one doesn't have to learn it as hard as I have. And now we won't talk about it any more, *ever*, Cherry," said Phonse, with dignity. "I used to hate the clock and the multiplication-table, but I don't think much about those now, nor how much any fellow sneers at me. I tell you, Cherry, there's nothing so bad, not half so bad, as to have to sneer at yourself!"

Phonse's penitence and self-scorn were so deep as to be almost beyond Cherry's comprehension, and she could think of no consolation that seemed adequate.

"I didn't tell you, Cherry"—Phonse's heavy face became bright—"Madame Mièl is coming to Byerly again this winter, and Uncle David says I may have lessons of her if I learn the multiplication-table before school begins, and if I stick to arithmetic and algebra until I've mastered them. I shall!"

"Of course you will, and it will be beautiful," said Cherry, heartily.

"I *can* draw, you know," said Phonse, with a long breath of satisfaction.

While this conference was going on in the rainy-day attic, where all the young people were in the habit of retiring when strict privacy was desirable, Philander and Simmy, also in private conference, sat on the woodpile behind Deacon Backup's barn.

"Now I've got on the confessin' tack, as you might say, Simmy, there's one other thing that I'm a-goin' to own up to—only jest to you, Simmy, and with the understandin' that it ain't to go any further. Bein' I'm a-goin' to marry your ma's hired girl, you and me are kind of relations, if I may make bold to say so."

"So we are; it's queer that I didn't think of it before," said Simmy, heartily, much touched by this evidence of Philander's esteem.

"And I don't mind tellin' you what I wouldn't tell some folks. You know now that them dragons and bears and things was made up, and that I ain't no old tar; but there's one thing that you nor nobody hain't never suspected, and that some wouldn't never own up to. But I'm one that when I get a-goin' I go the whole figger. Simmy, jest between you and me, I ain't and I never was a man of courage."

Various thoughts flew from Simmy's brain to the very end of his nimble tongue. "I ain't, either," was what almost popped out the very first thing, and "that's what Ben always said," came next. But Simmy had learned the value of second thoughts, and neither of these candid remarks did he make. "It must be orfle," he said, sympathetically. "You ain't afraid of the dark, are you?" he added, with sudden interest.

"Well, no, I ain't so bad as that, and I can stand up agin a thunder-storm, but I hain't any hankerin' after fire-arms. I never handle that old rifle without makin' sure it ain't loaded. Simmy, there wa'n't nothin' in it that night we went huntin' in Roarin' Brook woods. I'm a philosopher, you know, Simmy, and I reasons that night that where wild beasts has killed one fire-arms has killed thousands. I never let Ben get hold of that rifle, for fear he'd find out that 'twa'n't loaded; he's terrible sharp, Ben is, and he ain't afraid *enough.* If it wa'n't for my unloadin' that gun on the sly, 'tain't noways likely that he'd have the use of any of his limbs to-day, to say nothin' of bein' killed. You remember that time, Fourth of July, Simmy, when I teched off the cannon?"

Simmy nodded a vigorous assent. "And you said it set you to thirsting for glory," he said.

"Simmy, that was figgerative language; it never done no such a thing," said Philander, solemnly. "I had such an *in*vite that I couldn't decline without lettin' folks suspect that I was afraid. It's mortifyin' to have folks know that you're afraid."

"Yes, it—it must be," said Simmy.

"It was terrible tryin', but I done it, and that was the only time I ever fired anything off. I'm always expectin' that I shall be obleeged to fire the old rifle, but Providence and my keepin' it onloaded has seemed to favor me."

"If ever you should want help about it, you might just come to me," said Simmy, eagerly. One of the things to which his courage was equal was the old rifle, Simmy felt sure. "If ever you get afraid of anything you might come to me," continued Simmy, valiantly. "Of course I'm not very big, but just seeing that I wasn't afraid might help you."

"I expect now I'd better go to milkin'," said Philander. "Them kind of peaceful avercations is what gives a man a green old age, Simmy, more'n follerin' the sea or handlin' fire-arms."

Simmy got meditatively down from the wood-pile, and walked away. He wondered whether he should ever become as resigned as Philander was to the "peaceful avocations" which a lack of courage made necessary. It seemed doubtful whether a boy who was afraid of the dark could ever become a cowboy, or a lion-tamer, or even the engineer of a lightning express.

Little Caleb came running towards him with his slate in his hand; it was upon this slate that little Caleb's talent, in one form or another, continually found expression.

"Little Caleb, what shall you do when you are a man?" asked Simmy, seriously. (Little Caleb was not in the least afraid of the dark.)

"I shall tell stories, like Philander. See, I have written a composition, like what they write at school. It is about a man. Mother told me to write about a man. You may read it."

Simmy made a wry face as he took the slate. He was not of a literary turn.

"CoMpERsİsHUN BY C BACk Up JUNEYER
A MAN İs A BEİNG . HE İs sPLİT İN 2 AT
WUN END . HE WOKs ON THE sPLİT ENDs."

"I shouldn't wonder if you did get to be a story-teller like Philander," said Simmy, rather because he felt a desire to encourage little Simmy than because he appreciated this literary effort. "I can tell *you* they don't have many such compositions as that over to the 'cademy! But I don't know what I shall be." Simmy spoke in a tone that touched little Caleb's heart.

"You might keep a show," he suggested, hopefully.

"Let's go and take a look at old Garibaldi," said Simmy, brightening a little.

"Oh, I was going to tell you, only my composition made me forget it! Old Mr. Lancaster wants to buy him. Father told him he was yours. He says you may sell him, and have the money yourself."

Simmy leaned over the sty, and gazed at Garibaldi; there were no signs of talent or education about him; he was a pig pure and simple.

"I will sell him," said Simmy. "And oh, I know what I'll do!" Every trace of dejection had vanished from Simmy's face. "I'll go over to Belford and ask Mr. Pringle to sell me one of his bear cubs."

Bright and early the next morning Simmy concluded his negotiations with Mr. Lancaster, and with the money in his pocket set out for Belford. It was a five-mile walk, but happy visions cheered Simmy on his way. If he set out plain Simmy Backup, in his old jacket, and afraid of the dark, before he arrived at Belford he had become "the Hon. Simeon Backup, owner of the celebrated bear ——, the delight of all the crowned heads of Europe." (Simmy did not know just what the prefix Hon. meant, but he was certain that it ought to be applied to so great a man as the proprietor of a distinguished bear.) The problem of a name for the bear could not be settled until Ben had been consulted. He would have asked Ben to go with him, if it had not been for the pleasure of giving him a delightful surprise.

Grandpa Pringle, after some hesitation, consented to sell one of his bear cubs.

"They're master pretty little creturs," he said, "and I wouldn't let one of 'em go to anybody that I wa'n't sure would take good care of him; but I liked the way you managed with the Captain. I expect you're pretty smart."

"*Pretty* smart," answered Simmy, with modest candor; "and Ben is smarter than I am; and we've had an orfle lot of experience."

Grandpa Pringle referred feelingly to his own disappointment. He had accepted the position offered him at the Chelmsborough Museum; he had hired the little house and shop in the row, but he had set his heart upon having Dilly Gage to keep house for him, and be a daughter to him in his old age; and now that he had lost her he was tempted to give up all his new prospects.

"There was old Mr. Peter Toots, at the poor-house; he had a stroke, but when his rich son turned up he

had him moved to New York. It didn't hurt him any. Dilly Gage might bring her father with her."

"I declare if you ain't more'n a *pretty* smart boy!" exclaimed Grandpa Pringle. "If I thought of that at all it seemed kind of impossible. But I believe it ain't. I'll see what the doctors say, anyhow. I don't care any great about Preserved Gage's s'ciety, but I'd rather take him than to go without Dilly."

Grandpa Pringle was so gratified at Simmy's suggestion that he insisted upon his accepting the cub as a present; and Simmy, on his homeward way, had the additional happiness of reckoning up how much of a start in the show business might be made with his pig-money.

Both Simmy and Ben were wild with delight over the bear cub, and quite forgot to tell of Simmy's suggestion which had been so favorably received by old Grandpa Pringle. And so it happened that the very first that Cherry heard of Dilly Gage was when, a week afterwards, Grandpa Pringle came in with a beaming face to tell them that Dilly, with her father, was expected to arrive in a few days at the little house in the row. And he made so bold as to ask them to help him to prepare it for her reception!

Never did a man find more willing helpers; no more delightful excitement could be imagined than this of getting Dilly Gage's little house ready for her coming. Rhoda was almost as eager and enthusiastic as Cherry, and willing to sacrifice her own tastes that things might be just as Dilly would like to have them. They bought the prettiest carpets and furniture to be found in Chelmsborough—Grandpa Pringle displayed a comfortably fat purse, and was anxious that there should be no "skimpin'"—and the very muslin curtains of Cherry's dreams, tied back with ribbons. Rhoda made a beautiful

little hand-screen; she made it of that very piece of cameo-pink silk, and painted wild-roses upon it, and trimmed it with silver fringe, as she had intended to do for the fair. When Cherry looked her surprise she said: "I don't think I shall ever like to see it, but it may be good for me when I go to see Dilly. Yes, I shall go to see her—if she wants me to." But so many queer things were happening that this scarcely seemed queer at all.

Phonse drew a delightful motto. He scowled when Cherry suggested it, but he did it nevertheless. He would not draw a scroll of lilies, with "Consider the lilies" upon it, like one that Rhoda had seen, but he drew a most fascinating old witch astride a broomstick, with a lot of funny little goblins, and the words were: "Ne witch, ne goblin black daur come, to mar ye comfort of your home."

There were pretty fixings everywhere, such as Dilly would be sure to like. They had but little time, but they worked with a will.

And then, most delightful of all, Grandpa Pringle proposed that there should be a little house-warming when Dilly should arrive. Nothing "too lively," for Dilly would be tired, and there was her father to be thought of. It was to be observed that Grandpa Pringle made a wry face when he spoke of Preserved Gage, but he hastened to make amends for it by saying: "Seems as if there must be a little spark of good in that old rascal, or Dilly wouldn't think so much of him. But, then, he's her father, and Dilly ain't one that can forget it. I had a letter from the doctor that has 'tended him, and he said 'twa'n't best to tell her that he hadn't a great while to live, she seemed to feel so bad about him."

Only a few friends, he thought, might be invited to welcome Dilly, and he "rather guessed" she hadn't a

great many. There were the Bumpus girls, and 'Lando Bumpus, and old Mrs. Fickett from the Roaring Brook settlement, and the Flying Hill Farm people. After all that had been and gone, Dilly had said she thought they "was her friends." If the company seemed to them "a little mixed," he hoped they would be able to put up with it for Dilly's sake.

Rhoda said at once that she was sure she should enjoy it very much. How delightfully it had changed Rhoda to be for once in her life to blame! thought Cherry. Phonse—it must be admitted that Phonse scowled rather badly at first, and permitted himself to say uncomplimentary things about the house-warming—Phonse would be Phonse to the end of the chapter; but he ended by not only consenting to go, but to act as master of ceremonies and wear a Jacqueminot rose in his button-hole.

Ben and Simmy (the latter having been invited as a particular friend of Grandpa Pringle) accepted the invitation with great eagerness, chiefly, as it appeared, with a view of catching a glimpse of the alligator.

Loveday showed great enthusiasm in preparing toothsome delicacies for the occasion. "It's easy for folks to be mistaken about their fellow-creatures," was all that she said, but Cherry perfectly understood that the angel-cake, and the charlotte-russe, and the lemon jelly, were an atonement to Dilly Gage for having misjudged her. And she said she meant "to go with her good victuals to see that they wa'n't spoiled in the serving." Lest this should seem too much of a concession, she added that "it did seem queer doin's when their children went to a party 'long of Roarin' Brook folks. Mebbe 'twas all right, but she hoped their Aunt Adam would come to live at the Farm, as Squire Brewster expected, for the responsibility of them children was

too much for her shoulders—if it did seem, with all their actions, that they was growin' better instead of worse."

Tildy tossed her curls, and said she "expected that if their folks could demean themselves to go to Dilly Gage's party she should have to go to wait upon 'em, though she couldn't say that she shouldn't let Roarin' Brook folks know that she felt the difference." But in spite of her scorn it was noticeable that Tildy took great pains with her toilet, and was decked with hot (curling-iron) crimps instead of the cold (curl-paper) ones, which sufficed her for all but the greatest occasions.

It was an exciting and a delightful moment when, her father having been carried safely to his bedroom and settled comfortably there, Dilly was led to the sitting-room, where her guests were all assembled. There was old Mrs. Fickett (who had always been neighborly about her shawl), very old indeed, and very fat, who was constantly falling into cat-naps to awake with a start, and say to her nearest neighbor that she "had always known Dilly Gage was born for great things; she had felt it in her bones." There was Cally Bumpus in a dress as pink as her feather, and with a string of great white wax-beads around her throat; and her lame sister with a pale and patient face, but eyes shining now with pleasure; and 'Lando in a scarlet necktie and a large brass watch-chain. Phonse was graceful and elegant, and trying hard (in accordance with private advice delicately given by Cherry) not to scowl. Cherry, radiant, was making herself perfectly at home, and Rhoda was trying to do so, with only partial success. She looked a little flushed and uneasy as Dilly stood in the door-way.

Dilly looked at the pretty, cheerful room, and then around at the familiar faces.



"DILLY GAGE'S HOME-COMING."

"It's comin' home and findin' own folks!" she cried. And then she burst into tears.

Grandpa Pringle, whose very bald head seemed to shine with delight, said he "wasn't going to have any of that," even if they were happy tears, and Dilly speedily showed an April face. She spoke to Rhoda almost the first one. She held out her hand to her, and said:

"It was real good of you to come." Rhoda took the hand in a firm little nervous grasp, and then, with a sudden impulse, she kissed her—kissed Dilly Gage!

Nothing saved Cherry from crying then, except the discovery that Ben and Simmy Backup, who held such girlish demonstrations in scorn, were, in the shadow of a curtain, indulging in derisive mimicry.

Philander sat modestly in the background with his fiddle. At the last moment Grandpa Pringle had been afraid that the occasion would not be lively enough, and had declared that they must have a dance, and he would lead out old Mrs. Fickett.

Every one claimed so much of Dilly's attention that it was long before Cherry could find an opportunity to ask her about the letter. She knew that Phonse wished to know what Preserved Gage had said.

"I didn't know first off whether he'd ever know anything again," said Dilly, when at length Cherry, in a quiet corner, had a chance to ask her question. "He never looked at me nor spoke, and I thought he was dyin'. I was scairt and I couldn't do nothin', and I said a verse I know; it's kind of a prayer. I said it first off to be like folks, and now it kind of helps me. First I knew father's lips was movin'; he never opened his eyes, and he never made a mite of a noise, but he was sayin' it after me! Then I knew he could hear me, and he could make me understand him. But he

wouldn't never say anything more till I read that letter out to him. Then he made his lips go again, and I made out after a while that he was sayin': 'Mebbe folks ain't so bad as I used to think they was, Dilly. And if I had a chance I'd be better. You can tell that boy I hain't nothin' agin him.'"

It seemed strange to wish to be forgiven by Preserved Gage, but Phonse really looked relieved when Cherry repeated those words to him.

They were dancing now, but the dancing could scarcely be called a success. Roaring Brook steps and those of Flying Hill Farm were hopelessly different, Rhoda did not like to dance with 'Lando Bumpus, and poor 'Lando, instead of being flattered, was much distressed. And Cherry took to heart the lesson upon the necessity of tact and discretion in the management of the alliance which she meant to form between civilized Byerly and the Roaring Brook settlement. Perhaps Dilly's house-warming was the only occasion on which they would ever meet just like this.

Things were much better when they all went down to see the fascinating stock of the little shop, and Ben and Simmy were repaid for the effort to adapt themselves to a social occasion which was not at all in their line.

It was while they were in the shop that Grandpa Pringle told of a queer happening about Dilly's horse. He had proved to be a horse once owned by the show company, which fact accounted for his queer curvetings and prancings, and which they had sold for a song to Lucius Perry because he was, as they thought, hopelessly diseased. Lucius Perry had put him under Dr. Clinch's care, and the good little doctor had cured him. Now the show company had bought him back again for twice what he had cost.

Dilly was anxious to give Cherry all the purchase-money, but was obliged to be contented with paying what the horse had cost.

"As orfle good as Grandpa Pringle is to me, it's real good to pay it without being beholden to anybody!" said Dilly, with one of her old flashes of independence.

It was almost midnight when they left Dilly to the peaceful possession of her cosey little home.

"Things are so much better and happier than when we drove home from Chelmsborough on that court day!" said Cherry, as they drove through the starlit night.

"Beats all how things have worked together for good!" said Loveday.

"A horned owl, a jackdaw, two talking parrots, an armadillo—if he *is* stuffed—white mice, and cockatoos, orfle queer rabbits, and an alligator, and a monkey coming!" murmured Simmy, sleepy, but haunted by the fascinating shop. "A fellow would never have thought that Dilly Gage would get up in the world like that!"

THE END.

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